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CHALLENGE 44

The Magazine of Science-Fiction Gaming

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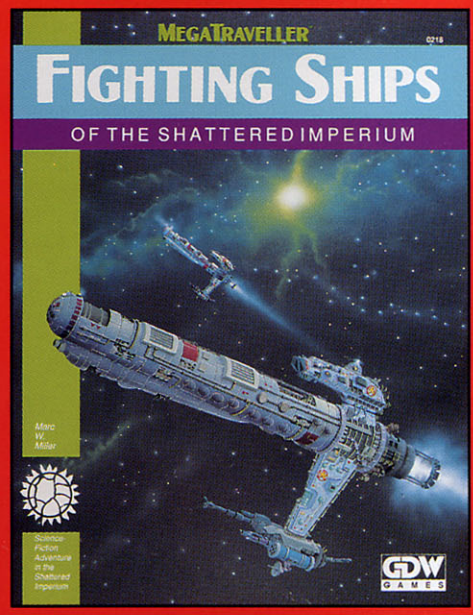
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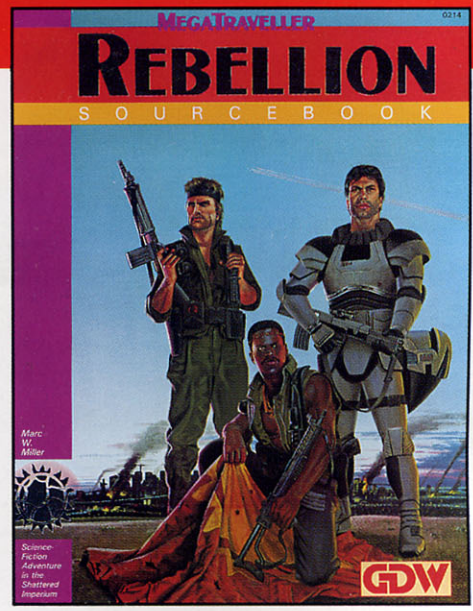
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Cyberfight 2300 AD transports you to a warped and violent future to witness a frenzied duel under neon light between two cybernetic gladiators. Artist Dell Harris is a two-time Chesley award winner and one of the foremost cyberpunk illustrators.

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The Magazine of Science-Fiction Gaming

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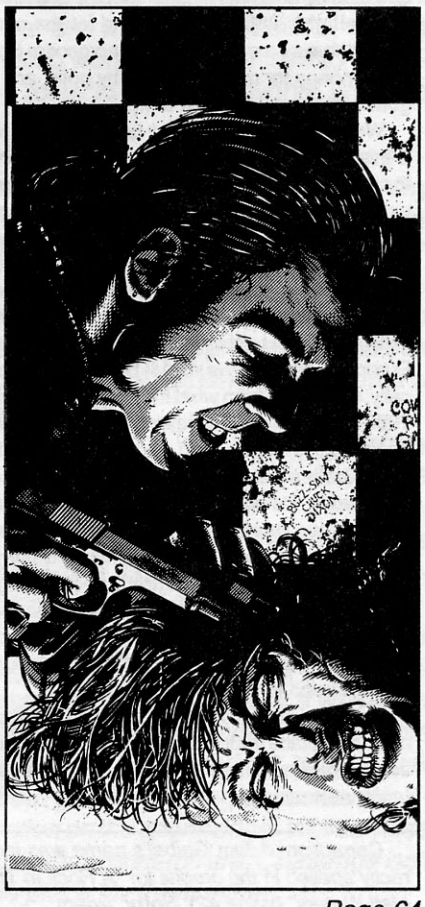
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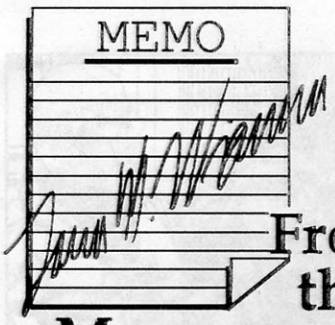
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From the Management

GDW is in the process of issuing the revision to **Twilight: 2000**. Last year, TSR, Inc. published the long-awaited **AD&D 2nd Edition. Paranoia, Call of Cthulhu**, and many other games have all been extensively revised at some time or another. The various **Warhammer** products have been through several revisions and new editions.

Many customers, wallets squeezed by their personal economic situation, wonder if it isn't all a gigantic (and not very subtle) plot to milk money from them. Why do game companies revise games? Didn't they do it right the first time?

The last question is facetious, of course. The notion that game companies revise games to force their customers to buy a whole new series of titles is silly. Sometimes I think that a lot of people feel that they deserve a subscription to a game because they bought it once.

Does Honda send you a new car when it changes models? Does Houghton-Mifflin send you a new geography textbook when one is revised?

Why do we do it? I'll answer the general question by dealing with the specific question of the **Twilight: 2000** revision, and let the microcosm serve as a model for the macrocosm (I paid good money for my thesaurus, by golly, and I'm gonna get some use out of it).

We are revising **Twilight** because the game is five years old, and the system was beginning to creak a little bit—it's getting old (like the rest of us). Frank Chadwick is constantly sharpening his (unquestioned) mastery of the craft of game design (we all learn over the years). Last year, he and I decided that the **Twilight** rules needed to be brought up to state-of-the-art standards.

Shortly after this, the political makeup of Europe (indeed, of the world) began to shift radically, especially from what it had been in the early 1980s. **Twilight: 2000** players and referees were beginning to notice, and we wanted to update things before the gap became too wide.

Besides, it's not just our present players and referees we have to think about. We have to compete with other RPGs for time and money. We have to continually attract new **Twilight: 2000** buyers. If the game system is old, leaking oil, and badly in need of a ring job, those customers will buy something else. It's for their good that we need to improve things.

Besides, you grognards out there probably need to replace your set anyway—the staples in the original booklets will only last about five years under normal use.

Correction: Adam Geibel's name was incorrectly spelled in the credits for "A Rock in Troubled Waters" (issue 42). Sorry, Adam.

CHALLENGE

Have any comments on this issue? How about science-fiction gaming in general? Letters from our Readers provides gamers an opportunity to air their views. The opinions presented do not necessarily reflect those of the magazine. ***Challenge*** *reserves the right to edit letters. Write to* ***Challenge*** *Letters, PO Box 1646, Bloomington, IL 61702-1646 USA.*

EQUIPMENT LIST

From the feedback results from the last four issues, **Twilight: 2000** has been in the top three best-liked articles in the issues, so put an article or two more in **Challenge** magazine. An article suggestion would be to bring back the equipment list. Bring it back, but don't reprint vehicles or publish pictures (if they want pictures, people can go to the library). Publish equipment that people send in (you must get at least two or three new designs a week). This would give people the impression that they are contributing to the evolution of **Twilight: 2000**.

Keep up the good work.

Gary Gore
Ontario, Canada

Twilight *is one of our most popular series, and we have two exciting articles this issue.*

Unfortunately, we get many fewer equipment submissions than you might think. Articles and ideas are always welcome.

GREAT REVIEWS

We at West End Games would like to thank you and your staff for the excellent reviews and articles on our products that have been appearing over the last few issues of **Challenge**. Julia Martin's reviews, in particular, show an understanding and thoroughness that other game reviews very often fall short of. It is evident that she takes her job seriously, and we appreciate such total coverage and evaluation (the *Star Wars Campaign Pack* review in issue 34 is a fine example of this).

Bill Slavicsek
West End Games

AT THE FOREFRONT

I have been playing **Traveller** and, now, **MegaTraveller** for about 11 years, and would like to congratulate your company on your ongoing efforts to keep this game in the forefront of science-fiction roleplaying. Many games have come and gone, but **(Mega)Traveller** has always been of the highest quality, and your constant efforts to continue this are heartening in this age of "good enough for government work." Your integration of history, psychology (particularly the alien modules), and adventure has been the precursor to many hours of enjoyment for myself and my campaigners.

I am looking forward to playing **MegaTraveller** for many more years and would just like to say to you, "Keep up the fantastic work!"

Trevor Timmons

GAMING MATERIAL APPRECIATED

I am a rather recent admirer of your magazine. What intrigued me about your publication is the subject material and the fact that your articles serve to provide additional gaming material instead of just reviews, purely theoretical abstracts, or fiction. Since I have created such additional material for myself for several years now, I feel that your magazine needs more articles on *Star Trek, Star Wars,* and *Renegade Legion.*

I think **Challenge** has a very professional, pleasing look. I also think theme issues are a great idea and have several suggestions. First, how about an issue devoted to vehicle design? Many of the games you cover have rules for vehicle construction (**MegaTraveller, 2300 AD, Star Trek** and **Renegade Legion**, to name a few).

Other theme issues might be Adversaries (the empire for *Star Wars*, the kraag for **Space: 1889**, Klingons/Romulans for *Star Trek*, the Warsaw Pact for **Twilight: 2000**, etc.) or aerial combat.

David Mack
Fairborn, OH

Letters from our Readers

FEEDBACK

The recent issues of **Challenge** have been excellent. I greatly appreciate the fact that you cover more than GDW games now—this fills a wide gap in the industry.

In the Future is also excellent. I really like the GDW product news. This fills a gap left by the demise of the old GDW product newsletter, which I enjoyed receiving.

Frederick Paul Kiesche III
Franklin Park, NJ

When I originally subscribed to **JTAS**, I really enjoyed it. But now **Challenge** has fallen far below the quality of the earlier magazine. I am really disappointed by the latest issue—it's too bad you can't drop all the junk and just stick to **Twilight**, **2300 AD** and **MegaTraveller**.

Richard T. Artis
Columbus, IN

This month's coverage on **MegaTraveller** and **2300 AD** is excellent! Keep it up.

Wilson Liaw
Worthington, OH

I would like to say that I think **Challenge** is the best gaming magazine around, and I think you are doing a great job.

Joaquin Atwood-Ward
Topanga, CA

WORLDVIEW

I haven't seen **Challenge** magazine since GenCon, but I recently happened to spot issue 41.

By ill luck I glanced first at an editorial by Timothy B. Brown, wherein he talked about the current "peaceful" state of the world and the need for creative anarchic solutions for RPGs. I don't have the text at hand, but I recall Brown said something to the effect of, "Let's face it, the world is getting more peaceful by the decade.... My father and I haven't had to fight in a major war, and now it looks like my son won't have to either." He concludes (generalizing from this example) that the world today is less warlike than in times past.

What simplistic and pernicious nonsense!

Simplistic? Yes, because Brown generalizes from his own parochial, America-first worldview. As Michael Renner reports in the Worldwatch Institute's *State of the World 1989* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1989), "Some 22 wars have been raging in the '80s, more than in any previous decade in recorded military history. Some 120 armed conflicts in the Third World since 1945—in terms of death, collectively the equivalent of World War II—have killed at least 20 million people. Many of these conflicts are far removed from the minds of westerners, but some may be the tinderboxes from which a future conflict might rapidly spread to global conflagration." Renner cites as his own source Ruth Sivard's *World Military and Social Expenditures 1987-88.*

Brown's point may also be simplistic in that he presumably restricts his "peace" argument to the absence of literal war (i.e., armed conflict between opposing armies). If so, he overlooks many oppressive regimes that brutalize their own citizens without the technical declaration of war. I cite as the most severe among many examples the Pol Pot regime, which killed a couple of million Cambodians between 1973 and 1975. Brown might exclude this atrocity from his rosy vista of "world peace" since this was not a war, but ignoring such violence on this technicality would be asinine.

So much for the "peaceful" world. Why do I call Brown's whitewashing pernicious? Because by presenting this worldview to the readership of **Challenge**, Brown may lull uninformed readers into sharing his own ethnocentric complacency. Other media are already doing this, thank you. GDW need not do its part as well.

For example (bear with me during this apparent digression) note how shortsighted is much of the news media's coverage of Eastern Europe's rush to freedom. Laudable it is—and a cause to celebrate. But responsible observers also acknowledge that the breakup of the Warsaw Pact will upset the current political balance. On NPR's *All Things Considered*, an honorable exception to the usual run of blindered news sources, I heard one commentator predict that if Hungary and Romania become self-deterministic, they will be at war within a few years.

In the same fashion, news reporters routinely overlook dangerous trends until they explode into full crises. Though environmentalism is starting to become fashionable and a few stories mention "staggering Third World debt," even yet most people don't equate environmental damage or debt burdens with political upsets and wars.

To relate this to the subject at hand: Brown's editorial shows this same myopia. Bloomington is at peace—tonight's news says we're friends with Russia—look, the world is more peaceful! Never mind that a dozen causes of destabilization loom in the near future: population pressures, the fragile global economy, even (possibly) climactic change. No, since I haven't had to fight a war and my son won't either, we can all stop worrying and retire into the living room to play our favorite anarchic RPGs.

I'm reminded of a remark Isaac Asimov made in another context. "Why should he worry?" Asimov wrote. "After all, the leak isn't in his end of the boat."

I don't say Brown's viewpoint astonished me. Such parochialism is all too common. What surprised me was that you allowed **Challenge** to become a forum for it.

Allen Varney
Austin, TX

In Tim's defense, I think he is just as concerned as you are about the present condition of the world.

You're right, Alan: The world has far to go, but it has also made great progress. Can't we have a place where we don't have to think about world problems for awhile? We shouldn't have to talk about global warming or nuclear proliferation on the sports page. Vital as these and other concerns are, ***Challenge*** *isn't the place for them either.*

Crossburn

I used to like small towns. Now, I can't. You see, I went home after coming back from Europe—or tried to. My hometown was deserted, the folks' farm shot full of holes. I found a few graves out back—I didn't want to find out who they belonged to.

Each town I've been to since has offered nothing but fear and hatred. An army convoy disappeared somewhere around here—I'm not sure I want to find out what happened to it.

I've seen what's happened to small towns. Small towns have changed for the worse. I can't like them anymore. I can't call them home. My home is gone.

The team is to locate a CivGov army supply convoy that disappeared in the Iron Triangle region of Georgia. If the convoy is located, the supplies are to be recovered, if possible. If substantial resistance is offered by any belligerents, the team is to return to base for debriefing so that a stronger recovery team can be sent. (Substantial resistance is defined as meeting any hostiles with more than two functional tanks.)

If no resistance is met, but the supplies cannot be brought back, the supplies are to be hidden and secured with traps and mines. The team is then to return to base for debriefing so that a better-equipped recovery team can be sent.

Characters are allowed to use whatever weapons they own, and command will provide five Claymores and 60 rounds (20 shots) of rifle ammunition for each character on the recon/initial-recovery team. Command cannot provide any vehicles or spare any fuel until the supplies are recovered.

Background: Characters are assumed to be infantry affiliated with or under the command of elements of the 108th Light Infantry Division stationed in Fort Benning, Georgia. In recent weeks, marauder pressure on the 108th has increased through raids on food-producing regions. This has served to aggravate an already bleak situation since the drought has meant that the fields are dust dry and many farmers did not even bother with planting. They simply packed up and left for Florida, where rumors say the crops are better. The result is that many towns and farms have become deserted, and many fields are covered only with the stubble of last year's crop.

Military convoys have ensured that food pressures among military personnel have not become acute. Every few days, attrition. The convoys are what keep Fort Benning at its current level of military effectiveness.

Several small convoys actually run on a weekly rotation all through the Iron Triangle, and their travel through the area is a common event. Having these convoys captured by marauders is also quite common, and the Fort Benning enclave always responds by sending out a small squad in a clandestine action to recover the convoy and neutralize the marauders. Since the marauder forces tend to be small and disorganized, the squad-sized unit has always proven to be the most efficient and effective response. Every convoy so captured has been recovered by these "snoop and scoop" operations.

This time, it is the characters' turn to snoop and scoop. A military convoy carrying food, small arms, and diesel engine parts disappeared last night just outside Richland. No radio messages were picked up, and Fort Benning has no idea what happened to it. It is the characters' job to make the convoy reappear, whatever it takes.

Known Belligerents: From past patrols, the following intelligence has been collected and is common knowledge to the personnel and dependents at Fort Benning.

In Richland, two groups appear to be causing problems. The first is made up of ex-military personnel who have been raiding the countryside, demanding minimal tolls from farmers in exchange for use of the roads. Militia groups have been unable to neutralize them. This group is believed to be well armed and well trained, and is hostile toward CivGov.

Near Friendship to the southeast is a group of bikers who parade in the tradition of Hell's Angels. They are armed with



Michael Johnson

Johnson grew up in the worst section of Chicago and spent much of his time in street gangs. After a drive-by shooting killed fellow gangmembers, Johnson decided to escape the cycle of street death by joining the army. Over the winter of 2000, Johnson and others in his unit became upset with the 108th's commanding officers. By Christmas, he and his group had decided to desert, and they left the following night.

Johnson has no love for the 108th. He will be abrasive toward anyone not in his unit, often shooting first and asking questions later. Even if characters manage to speak with him, they will find that he refuses to cooperate in any military venture and that he shares information very cautiously.

Johnson's experience in street gangs has taught him the benefits of avoiding authorities and the proper use of terror. His time with the army taught him squad-level tactics and made him proficient in his use of firepower. This experience makes him a dangerous opponent.

The fact that Johnson is a black man in the heart of a white supremacist revival has made him fear for his life, and this fear has made him even more volatile that before.

One curious aspect of Johnson is that he keeps a very detailed set of diaries in which he notes everything that has happened. He noted the passage of the Widowmakers' convoy in the early morning hours following the night of attack and saw that they turned west on a dirt road approximately two kilometers south of Brooklyn. Referees may use this to give a clue to characters if Johnson is killed.

NPC Motivation Results: *Spade 5:* Power. This motivation manifests itself as a desire for Johnson to control his own destiny. By being a marauder and a deserter, Johnson has this control. But now the political environment of the Stewart and Webster counties has proceeded far beyond his control, and he is getting very nervous. *Heart 2:* Fellowship. Johnson's fellowship is not friendliness, but a desire to belong to a group. This motivation is what led him into the street gangs. Now, he is extremely loyal to his own group and will always make the best decision for them.

The supply rooms next to the command bunker hold Celeste Sanders. She has not been treated well by the Widowmakers and is currently suffering from a minor disease (recovery number 200) and malnutrition (2 levels of fatigue). She will have to be carried out. She lies handcuffed to a metal cot, and her stringy hair and the dirt on her skin indicate that she has not washed for days. These supply rooms also hold ammunition and chemicals, as well as some of the homemade Claymores the characters encountered at the hijack site. There are also about 50 man-days of MREs and about 200 man-days of other preserved foods (hardtack, salt pork, jerky, dried fruits and vegetables, etc.)

RETURN TO RICHLAND

Zeigler will escort the characters to Cussetta, an aid station can help Celeste Sanders. After this, the characters are ordered to escort Zeigler and Celeste to Richland to establish a military outpost so that other convoys passing through Richland will not be as prone to marauder attacks.

At the referee's discretion, the Good Ole Boys may have started a race war in Richland on the day of the characters' return or may start one later on. If this is the case, the entire town will be separated into groups of 1D6+3 rioters armed with rifles or melee weapons who will be wandering the streets, throwing stones at building and vehicles, and torching buildings. Dead and maimed bodies will be commonplace, and the crackle of gunfire will fill the air. The militia will all be hunkered down in the school sniping at the rioters who attempt to take the building. Their ammunition will run out on the second day if characters do not intervene, and they will be slaughtered by a mob.

The Good Ole Boys will prowl the town for the first three days. They will suffer five casualties when their targets shoot back. Then they will seek refuge in the countryside, holing up in a nearby farm. Three more will die in the escape from town.

The war will last for six days, at which time food pressures will force the rioters to devote more time to surviving than killing. Fully 45 percent of the population of Richland will be killed during the war. Characters who visit after this time will find mass graves being dug for the piles of corpses. Incidences of diseases like cholera will increase in the weeks following. No one has assumed authority, nor is anyone likely to for the next few months. People will begin leaving the town as the summer wears on, so that by winter, the only people present in Richland are transients.

ORGANIZATIONS

The following organizations play a part in this adventure.

New America

The militia at Richland was part of the New America cell assigned to take over Fort Benning and the surrounding countryside. Its orders came directly from high-level operatives subverting the command of the 108th Infantry. But early in the year, the militia broke away from the NA cell. Zeke Sanders, the militia leader, saw that the standard NA policies of slave-labor and racial hierarchy would only tear his home apart. He would be left to preside over a town of corpses.

Zeke Sanders and his men are natives of Richland, and they care a great deal about the town. They are also as racist as the rest of NA, but they know that to survive, they have to keep a fragile peace by forgetting their racism. To this end, Sanders has ordered that racially motivated violence is not to be tolerated. This has upset the Good Ole Boys and the black population, each of which views the pronouncement as an order which allows the other group to oppress them. So far, however, the pronouncement has worked. Racial tension is high in Richland, but incidents have been kept to a minimum. Sanders and his militia ensure that everyone is treated fairly.

Sanders and his militia, however, are not afraid to proclaim their New America membership. To them, being part of NA is the patriotic gesture of ensuring the supremacy of "Americans" over foreigners. Sanders keeps his New America banner hanging on the wall behind his desk, despite his break in contact. As far as the militia is concerned, they are still New Americans, and they are building a New America—just a bit slower than before.

Group Composition: The group consists of the following.

- Sanders (Veteran NPC with an M16A2) in command.
- Four squads, each with one Veteran NPC (with an M16EZ), two Experienced NPCs (with one pump-action shotgun and one M16EZ), and seven Novice NPCs (with three .30-06 BA rifles, four M16EZ).
- One squad with an Elite NPC (with an M16A2) replacing the command Veteran NPC. Otherwise identical to above squads.

Vehicles include three civilian pickup trucks and one jeep. The group is based out of an old elementary school in Richland. The school has been fortified with sandbags.

Johnson's Group

Johnson's group of marauders operates between Brooklyn and Richland. It is composed of ex-military people who broke with the 108th Light Infantry because of the growing influence of New America on the division's command ranks. The group split with the 108th in late October 2000 and stole enough supplies to last through most of the winter. Upon coming out of the cold but dry winter, Johnson's group set up camp in an old farmhouse and started raiding the farmers in the region.

The group began preying randomly on the traffic along the Richland-Brooklyn highway. Victims who willingly surrendered or who survived their own attempts at resistance were warned not to cooperate with the authorities or their families would be killed.

The group has decided to move out of the area and head to Savannah, where they will have more targets for raiding and may be accepted as the legitimate government of a small town or suburb.

The group has nothing to do with the convoy hijacking or with the kidnapping of Celeste Sanders, but it has heard the rumors and is eager to leave the area before the militia or other groups get any ideas which would involve the expenditure of large quantities of ammunition. The group does have useful intelligence related to the convoy ambush—members spotted a convoy of civilian vehicles and a HMMWV rolling on the Richland-Brooklyn highway just before sunrise on the morning after the ambush. The civilian convoy was headed north, toward Brooklyn, but turned west on a dirt path before reaching town. Johnson's group did not follow the convoy any farther.

Group Composition: Johnson's group is composed of a mix of several ethnic groups, including black, Semitic, Slavic, Amerindian, Hispanic, and Oriental. These are essentially the groups targeted by New America's racism, but there are also northern European descendants in the group who are there because of friendships and unit loyalties.

- One command squad composed of: Johnson (Veteran, M16A and 9mm pistol) in command, and two aides (Veteran NPCs with M16A2s).
- Two squads composed of one Veteran NPC (with an M16A2), five Experienced NPCs (with M16A2s), one Experienced NPC (with an M16A2/M203 grenade launcher), one Experienced NPC (with an M16A2 and M202 rocket launcher), and one Experienced NPC (with an M249 mini SAW). The group has no vehicles.

The group is located in an old farmhouse just off the Richland-Brooklyn highway approximately three kilometers north of Richland.

Good Ole Boys

The third group in the political triangle of racial tension in the Richland area is the Good Ole Boys. These people are not organized like Johnson's group or NA. They are a collection of friends who share racist beliefs. The Good Ole Boys can best be characterized as a loose association of bullies convinced of their own superiority. The Good Ole Boys are represented by Billy Finnegan, a 25-year-old farmer who spends much of his time generally espousing racist commentary and enlarging the chips on his friends' shoulders. The others in the group are also young.

Before the war, the Good Ole Boys were bored teenagers who enjoyed "blowing off steam" and "teaching people lessons." Often, the people taught these lessons were minorities whom the Good Ole Boys believed to be "uppity." The Good Ole Boys were also often firearms fanatics who amassed collections of civilian and military-style firearms.

Currently, the Good Ole Boys believe that the black community has "forgotten its place" and has been demanding too much of the militia. They also believe that the militia is as bad as traitors for not "controlling" the blacks and for allowing the blacks to "subjugate" the whites. Their anger at the situation has been building for a long time, and they are likely to launch an expedition against several black families within the next week, even if it means fighting the militia to do so.

The Good Ole Boys will not be willing to help any military personnel, as they view the military in the same way as they view the town militia.

In fact, if at least one of the characters is black, the Good Ole Boys will do their best to start a brawl with the characters. If the Good Ole Boys lose the brawl, then the survivors



Caryn Butler

Caryn Butler grew up in New York reading authors of strategy and politics, like Sun Tzu, Miyamoto Musashi, Clausewitz, and Machiavelli. She graduated with honors from Harvard Business School with an MBA, then accepted a position with a Columbus financial house in 1994. Her knowledge of strategy served her well, and she was rumored to have maneuvered three superiors into resigning. During the war, she linked up with the Widowmakers and became their leader when the previous one died. Butler has watched the decay of civil authority and believes this is a perfect opportunity to carve out a holding in Georgia. The Widowmakers have been laboring to this end since Christmas.

Butler leads the Widowmakers with strong discipline and pride in the idea that they are helping to rebuild a part of Georgia. She also appeals to their greed by stating that the group in power will be assured a good position in the new government when order is restored. Through this combination, the Widowmakers have become a highly motivated force. Butler is a woman who lusts after power. She knows that, as leader of a holding, she will have obtained a very high position indeed.

Butler is also a woman who enjoys taking risks. She views them as a challenge to her planning abilities. Referees may want the characters to meet her in Richland during the course of their investigation. She might join their party, then slip away in the middle of the night to send an assassination squad or to prepare defenses against the characters' weapons. Butler's appearance can be described as striking. Her business background has taught her the value of appearance, and she always looks well groomed despite the anarchy around her.

NPC Motivation Results: *Club Ace:* War leader. Butler's business training and her study of historical strategists and military philosophers have made her a very effective planner and strategist. This is the natural outgrowth of her belief that all life is conflict, and by becoming skilled at conflict, she has become better able to deal with life. *Spade 10:* Power. Butler desires power over other people. Her view that life is conflict stresses that the better people in life are the ones who can control this conflict and who can thus control others. This need for power is very strong, and Butler tends to examine each problem by asking which decision will give her the most power in the long term.

will lay low until the next nightfall before launching a lynching raid against three black families.

Group Composition: The group has no formal organization. The 24 members of the group will, for fire combat purposes, break into three groups of eight. The group members are listed as Experienced NPCs for skill levels and attributes, but they are not skilled in military tactics. If they are drawn into a firefight, they will be very clumsy in maneuvering. Also, although the group is called the Good Ole Boys, at least five female combatants are on the roster.

Weapons: Two M16A1s, four Ruger Mini-14s, three AR-15s, one Galil, three HK-93s, one HK-94 9mm carbine, three Remington 870 pump shotguns, one LAW-12 semiautomatic shotgun, one Valmet M78 (Finnish AKM clone), one FAL, one .30-06 bolt-action rifle, and three Steyr AUG-SAs.

In addition to the above, the Good Ole Boys have the usual assortment of alcohol Molotov incendiaries, dynamite, and other melee weapons. Also, every member has a revolver, either a .38 or a .357 Magnum.

Vehicles include 15 pickup trucks and three off-road motorcycles. The Good Ole Boys have no fixed base but can be found at either the individual members' farms or at one of the bars in Richland.

Widowmakers

The Widowmakers are a well organized survivalist group that has set up operations near Fort Benning. Many of the members worked in Columbus and Cussetta before the war. Fearing that Fort Benning would be a nuclear target, they established a fallout shelter on an old farm about five kilometers west of Brooklyn. Seeing political decay all around them, the Widowmakers were torn between attempting to assert themselves as a power in Stewart county or laying low and hoping the troubles would pass over them. The decision was made for them in late 2000 when their pro-isolationist leader was killed in a fall in the Quonset. Leadership was then passed to Caryn Butler, who initiated a plan to destabilize the local government in Richland through racial tensions. Her plan was to start a campaign of terrorism and to ensure that some other group got blamed. Since the winter of 2000, food pressures compounded by the drought have forced the Widowmakers to do more and more raiding. Also, in order to paralyze the Richland militia and raise racial tensions even higher, the Widowmakers kidnapped Celeste Sanders, the militia commander's daughter, and ensured that Johnson's group was blamed for it.

The recent strike at a military convoy will place even more pressure on the militia and will bring pressure on army troops based in Fort Benning. It will also mean food pressures on the Widowmakers will be eased for the next month or so.

Group Composition: The group is composed as follows.

- One command squad led by Caryn Butler (an Elite NPC with an M16A2), with two aides (Experienced NPCs with M16A2s).
- Two squads with one Veteran NPC (with an M16A2), three Experienced NPCs (with M16A2s), and one Novice NPC (with a .30-06 bolt-action).
- Two squads with one Veteran NPC (with a G3), three Experienced NPCs (with two G3s and one SPAS-12 shotgun), and one Novice NPC (with an M40 sniper rifle).

● Two machinegun teams with one Veteran NPC (with a G3) and one Novice NPC (with an M40 sniper rifle) armed with an M60 GPMG. Also armed with a Mk-19 grenade launcher if on duty in the water tower.

● One machinegun team with two Veteran NPCs (with G3s) armed with an M60 GPMG. Also armed with a Mk-19 grenade launcher if on duty in the water tower.

The group has five civilian 3/4-ton trucks, as well as one jeep. All commanders are in contact with voice-activated radio headsets.

TOURIST'S GUIDE TO STEWART AND WEBSTER COUNTIES

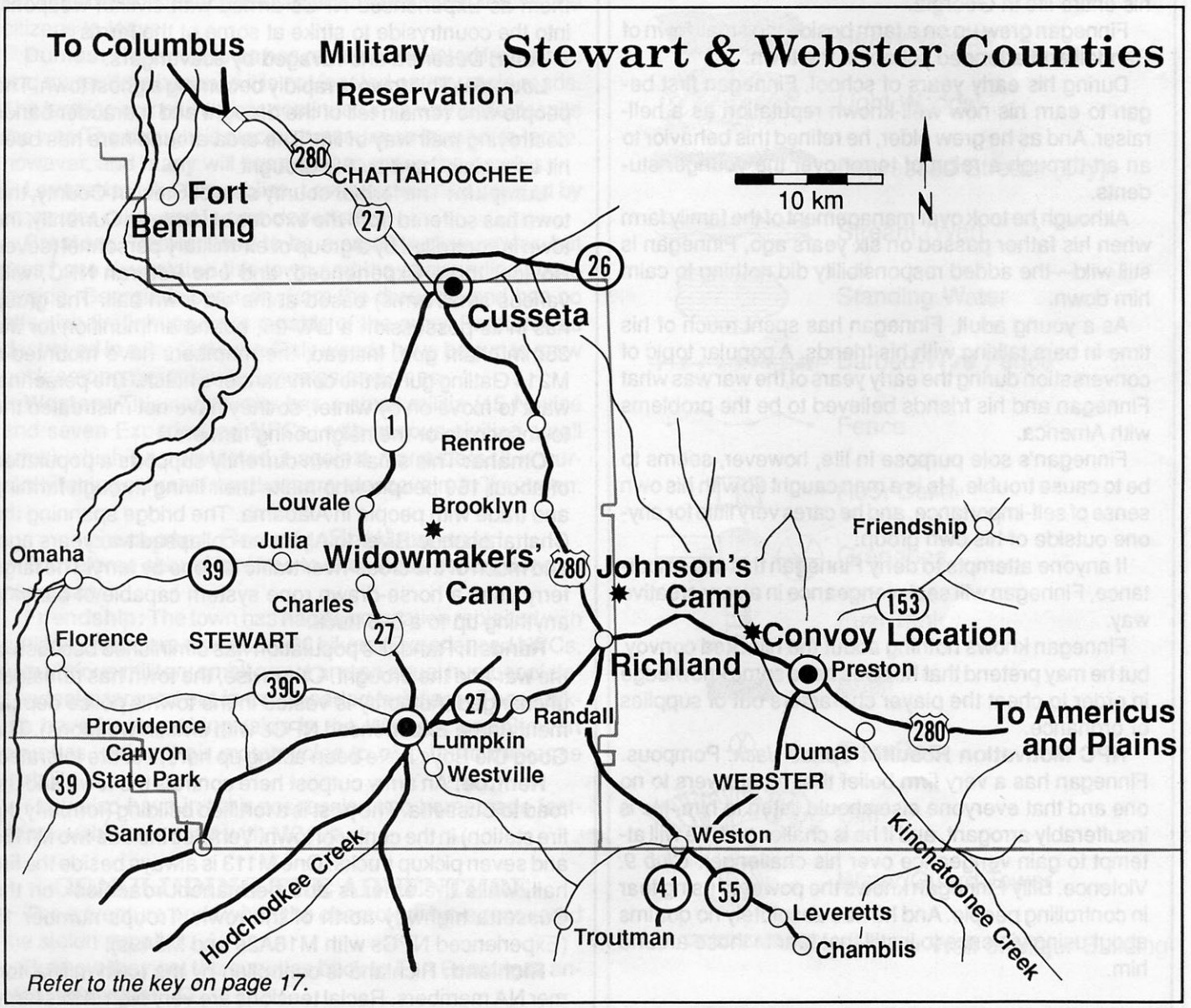
This adventure is set in northwestern Georgia in the late spring or early summer of 2001. It is past planting season for the farmers, and roughly 60 percent have chosen to leave Georgia rather than risk a crop on the persistent drought. No rain has fallen yet this year, nor is it likely to fall. Bare fields cover the area.

Already weeds are taking over the farmland in some areas, while others are covered only with powdery soil. Deserted farmhouses have weathered curtains that flap through the broken windows. The interiors of these buildings are filthy with the leavings of transients and refugees who used them for shelter in the past months.

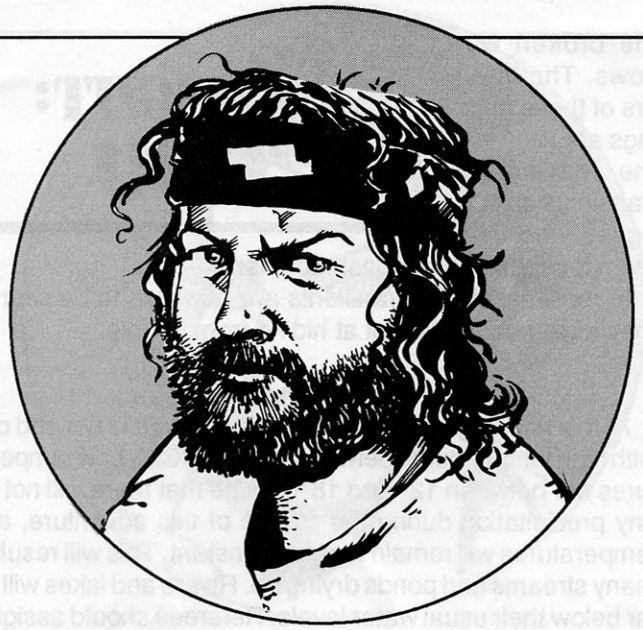
In most cases, the transients are nowhere to be seen—they have become adept at hiding from people.

Weather

At this time of year, the weather in Georgia is hot and dry, with high temperatures between 24° and 30°C. Low temperatures are between 12° and 18°C. Note that there will not be any precipitation during the course of this adventure, and temperatures will remain roughly constant. This will result in many streams and ponds drying up. Rivers and lakes will be far below their usual water levels. Referees should assign a 65-percent chance of streams and ponds being dry or only muddy during this time of year. Rivers and lakes will always have water.



Refer to the key on page 17.



Billy Finnegan

Billy Finnegan is now 25 years old, and he has spent his entire life in Georgia.

Finnegan grew up on a farm beside the small town of Randall and attended school in the town.

During his early years of school, Finnegan first began to earn his now well-known reputation as a hell-raiser. And as he grew older, he refined this behavior to an art through a reign of terror over the younger students.

Although he took over management of the family farm when his father passed on six years ago, Finnegan is still wild—the added responsibility did nothing to calm him down.

As a young adult, Finnegan has spent much of his time in bars talking with his friends. A popular topic of conversation during the early years of the war was what Finnegan and his friends believed to be the problems with America.

Finnegan's sole purpose in life, however, seems to be to cause trouble. He is a man caught up with his own sense of self-importance, and he cares very little for anyone outside of his own group.

If anyone attempts to deny Finnegan this self-importance, Finnegan will seek vengeance in a very creative way.

Finnegan knows nothing about the hijacked convoy, but he may pretend that he does have some knowledge in order to cheat the player characters out of supplies or ordnance.

NPC Motivation Results: *Spade Jack:* Pompous. Finnegan has a very firm belief that he answers to no one and that everyone else should listen to him. He is insufferably arrogant, and if he is challenged, he will attempt to gain vengeance over his challenger. *Club 9:* Violence. Billy Finnegan knows the power of using fear in controlling people. And he has absolutely no qualms about using violence to instill that fear in those around him.

Stewart County Settlements

The referee should feel free to alter these descriptions as necessary.

Brooklyn: The presence of the army less than 15 kilometers away has ensured order in this town. The town's militia (five Experienced NPCs with M16EZs) has been throwing its weight around in recent months and has started demanding tolls from nonmilitary people travelling through town.

Charles: Deserted and in disrepair because of scavengers.

Cussetta: The 108th established a strongpoint here manned by 300 troops and two M3 Devers CFVs. Numerous merchants flock here, hoping to trade with the concentration of troops. Cussetta has something of a boomtown atmosphere, but the unspoken knowledge held by everyone is that the boom is likely to bust—and soon.

Florence: This small town on the banks of the Chattahoochee River has been taken over by a crazed evangelist who has been "purifying" the town of sinners through executions. The populace is terrified, and many are fleeing in the night, leaving everything behind. The preacher has recently been sending patrols of his firearm-toting "apostles" (treat them as Experienced NPCs armed with civilian weapons) into the countryside to strike at some of the farms.

Julia: Deserted and ravaged by scavengers.

Louvale: This town is rapidly becoming a ghost town. The people who remain tell of the drought and marauder bands destroying their way of life. The area around here has been hit especially hard by the drought.

Lumpkin: The former county seat of Stewart County, this town has suffered from the exodus of farmers. Currently, the town is controlled by a group of ex-military personnel (seven Novice, three Experienced, and one Veteran NPC, with various small arms) based at the old town hall. The group has in its possession a LAV-25, but no ammunition for the 25mm chain gun. Instead, the members have mounted a M214 Gatling gun at the commander's hatch. The personnel want to move on by winter, so they have not mistreated the townspeople or the neighboring farmers.

Omaha: This small town currently supports a population of about 150 people who make their living through farming and trade with people in Alabama. The bridge spanning the Chattahoochee River to Alabama collapsed two years ago, and much of the cross-river traffic is done by ferry. The large ferry uses a horse-drawn rope system capable of carrying anything up to a 6×6 truck.

Randall: Randall's population has diminished because of the war and the drought. Otherwise, the town has remained unchanged. Authority is vested in the town's police department (three Experienced NPCs with civilian weapons). The Good Ole Boys have been acting up here, but are tolerated.

Renfroe: An army outpost here controls the town and the road to Cussetta. The post is a fortified building (formerly the fire station) in the center of town. Vehicles include two M113s and seven pickup trucks. One M113 is always beside the fire hall, while the other is at a permanent roadblock on the Cussetta highway north of the town. Troops number 15 (Experienced NPCs with M16A2s and M249s).

Richland: Richland is controlled by the town militia, former NA members. Racial tensions are very high in this farm-

ing community, and marauder attacks have not made the situation better. A small market exists here, selling ammunition, food, clothing, and other basic items.

Sanford: Deserted. Much of the community was wiped out in an army sweep to eliminate marauders operating out of Sanford and the former Providence Canyon State Park. Burned buildings now make uncomfortable homes for transients and refugees on the parched farmlands.

Troutman: Troutman is deserted. It is, however, home to a group of marauder cavalry troops (seven Novice NPCs, and 10 Experienced NPCs, with various civilian and military small arms, mounted) who have been launching raids into the neighboring towns in the adjoining two counties.

Westville: Since the bridges over the Hodchodkee and Pataula Creeks were destroyed by marauders in the previous autumn, Westville has withered and is now a ghost town. With no trade able to easily come in and with the drought, life in Westville became unbearable, and the citizens simply left.

Webster County Settlements

The referee should feel free to alter these descriptions as necessary.

Chambliss: Deserted. Marauder raids have forced the citizens to leave.

Dumas: This small town has remained isolated from trade and marauders because it is not located on any main roads. The farming community has continued in its way of life despite the war. The drought is placing pressure on farmers to leave, however, and many will soon start to make the exodus.

Leveretts: Like Chambliss, Leveretts was devastated by marauder raids and is now deserted.

Preston: Preston used to be a small trading center, but fires have devastated this town and the surrounding countryside. Georgia is bone-dry from the droughts and has no effective firefighting force outside of the army. Preston was destroyed in a fire last year. Only weeds have begun to grow back among the charred buildings and trees.

Weston: This community has a small militia (15 Novice and seven Experienced NPCs, with various civilian small arms) which has protected it against marauders. It is currently facing a threat from the marauder cavalry in Troutman.

Sumpter County Settlements

The referee should feel free to alter these descriptions as necessary.

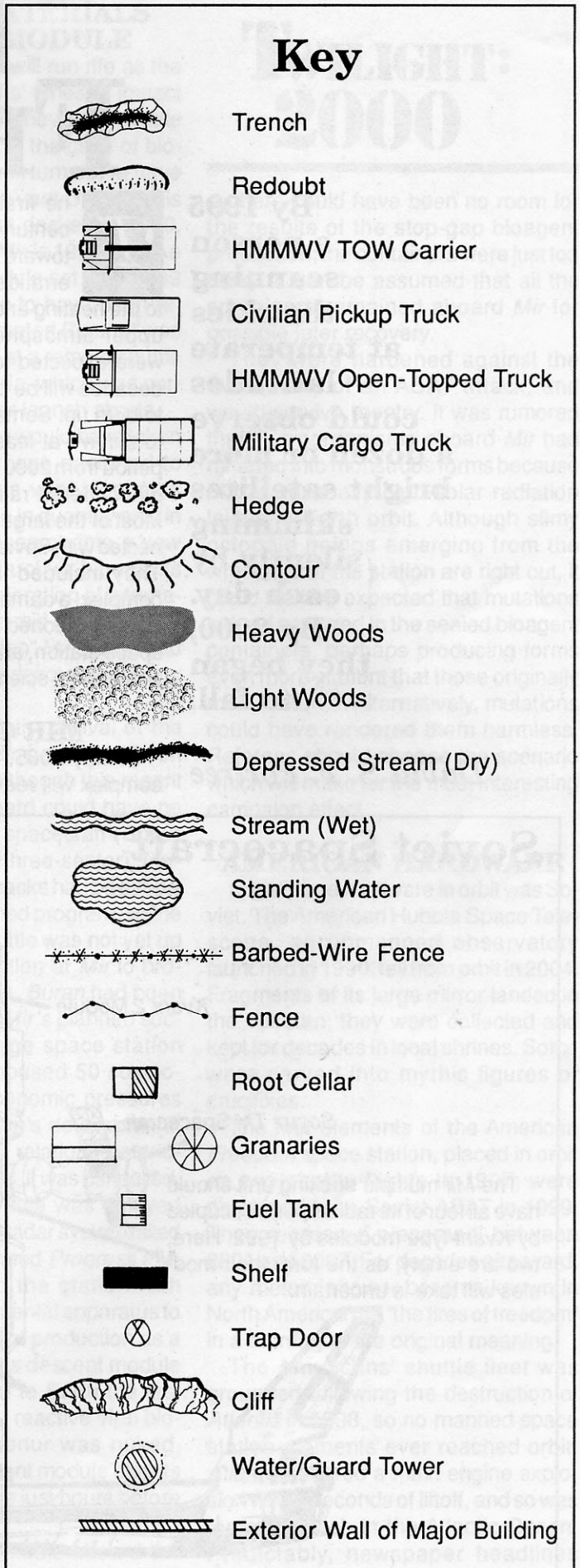
Friendship: The town has had its population replaced with ruffians. There are now about 20 bikers (Experienced NPCs, with various military small arms) and an equal number of dependents camped out in the deserted buildings. These bikers have been making raids in the Webster and Stewart counties, using their motorcycles to give them immense mobility.

They also have in their possession two homemade fast-attack vehicles armed with M249s.

CONCLUDING THE ADVENTURE

The adventure ends when the characters have recovered the stolen supplies.

But how they get the supplies back to Fort Benning is another adventure. Ω



FALLING FRAGMENTS

By 1995 a person scanning the skies at temperate latitudes could observe a dozen or more bright satellites skimming silently by each day. By 2000, they began to fall.

David S. F. Portree

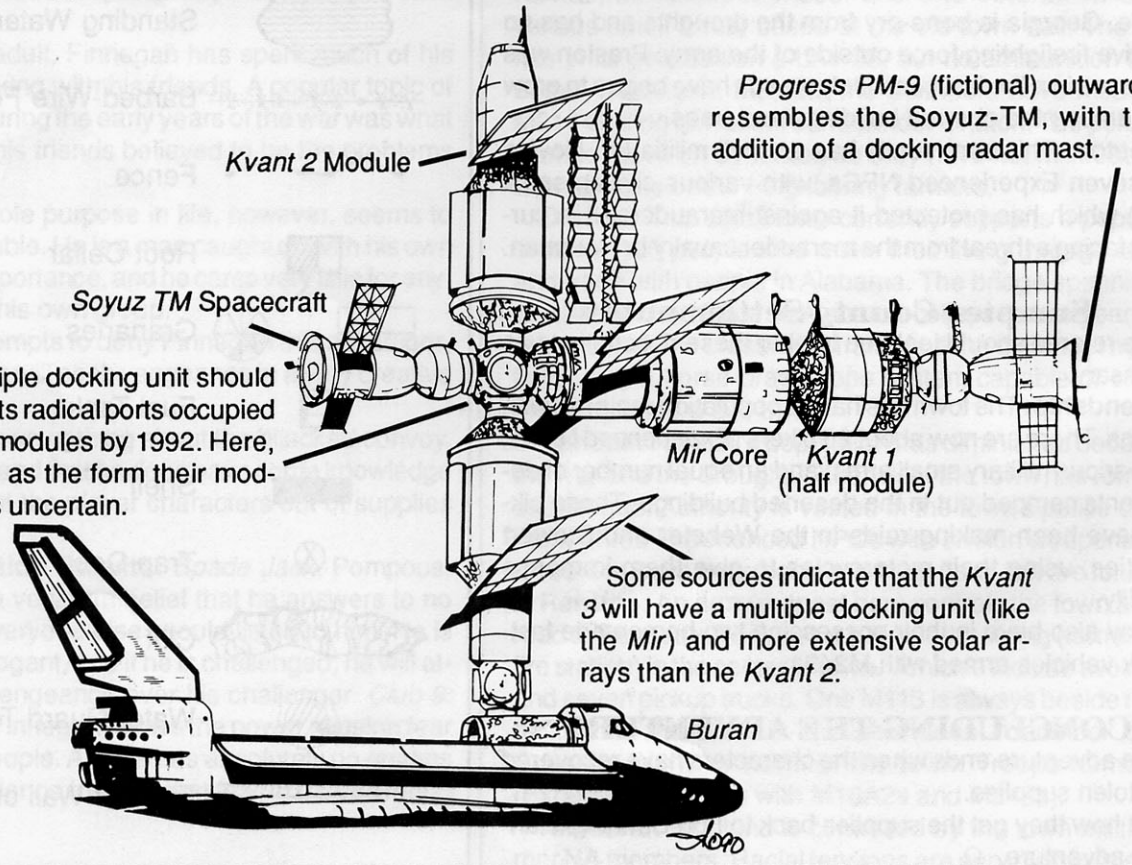
The first decade of the 21st century will continue a trend toward unusually strong and erratic solar behavior, leading to the heating and expansion of Earth's upper atmosphere. Satellites which were expected to remain in space for decades will be pulled from their orbits to burn up. Some will be large enough to survive at least partially intact—the period from 2000 to 2010 will be marked by scattered rains of satellite debris. Most of the largest satellites were connected with Soviet-manned spaceflight. They included the *Mir* space station complex, a damaged *Buran* shuttle, the long-abandoned *Salyut 7-Cosmos 1686* space station, and the free-flying *Kvant 3* materials science module.

MIR COMPLEX

In May 2005, the *Mir* space station complex will reenter the Earth's atmosphere. During *Mir*'s last days, the best forecasters (all seven of them left alive) can say only that it will come down somewhere in Europe.

The *Mir* complex was abandoned in 1999 after the nuking of Baikonur Cosmodrome, the Soviet Union's manned spaceflight center. The six cosmonauts working aboard *Mir* could expect neither fresh supplies nor relief, so they closed down systems and fled the complex. Three cosmonauts returned successfully to Earth in the descent module of the *Sayuz TM-22* spacecraft which had been docked at the front docking port of the space station. The remaining three cobbled together makeshift couches in the descent module of the *Progress PM-9* cargo craft attached to the rear port. The *Progress PM* descent module was designed to carry only manufactured products from the station, not crews. American radars tracked it to

Soviet Spacecraft



a landing in mountainous Tibet, but the fate of the cosmonauts is unknown.

When abandoned, *Mir* massed about 150 tons. It comprised the *Mir* "core" module and a *Kvant* "half-module," to which were attached three 20-ton *Kvant* modules. Solar batteries (panels) sprouted from the station at unlikely angles. Many had been added over the years to keep available sufficient amperage to run experiments as the original panels decayed.

Throughout World War III *Mir* remained intact, despite the presence of ASAT weapons. ASATs were not used because the Americans feared *Mir*'s destruction would fill near-Earth space with thousands of pieces of debris, further hastening through debris collisions the collapse of the already faltering American surveillance, weather, and navigation satellite networks.

DAMAGED *BURAN* SHUTTLE

The *Buran* shuttle was intercepted shortly after final orbital insertion by an American ASAT and crippled. It will reenter over north Africa during September 2004.

The *Buran* space shuttle launched unmanned the day before Baikonur was destroyed slowly flashes at Earth-bound observers as it tumbles across dawn or dusk skies. The *Buran*'s objectives were unknown, but it may have been launched to rescue the cosmonauts aboard *Mir*, to recover the *Kvant 3* materials (usable in Soviet military hardware on the ground), or simply to get it clear of Baikonur, which was a tempting target for a nuclear strike. *Buran* constituted the pinnacle of Soviet spaceflight achievement, and featured components which, if they could survive the war, could be used as examples to help rebuild Soviet technology.

Rumors were rife that both *Mir* and the *Buran* carried radioactives, chemical or biological toxins, and even conventional and nuclear explosives. The nature and seriousness of the threats (if any) the derelict spacecraft posed depended on the teller—the rumors were probably hysteria-induced phantoms. The alleged seriousness of the threats grew to frightful proportions as the rumors were passed around, and became wholly outrageous as reentry of the spacecraft approached.

KVANT 3 MATERIALS SCIENCE MODULE

Hysterical rumors will run rife as the various orbiting crafts' times of impact near. Most rumors will be at least a little ludicrous; however, in the case of biological toxins, they will turn out to have basis in fact. The *Kvant 3* materials science module, first docked in 1990, was detached from *Mir* in 1998 to make way for a secret module set for a 1999 launch. *Kvant 3* was to have been recovered by the automated *Buran*. It was then to have landed at a remote shuttle landing strip in Siberia, which was normally on stand-by for launch aborts.

The secret module would have taken its place on *Mir*. It was designed to produce highly toxic viral bioagents which could be made in quantity only in weightlessness. Research into a new generation of destructive bioagents began with the deterioration of international relations in the mid-1990s. At the same time, the "civilian" *Mir* station had become increasingly devoted to military research.

In preparation for the arrival of the bioagent module, *Mir*'s staff had been boosted to six, even though this meant three of those onboard could have no emergency escape spacecraft (*Soyuz TM-22* was strictly a three-seater). *Perestroika*-related cutbacks had bit deeply into the Soviet-manned program, so the 10-seater *Buran* shuttle was not yet up to being kept on station at *Mir* to provide an escape route. *Buran* had been designed to service *Mir*'s planned successor, *Mir 2*, a large space station which could have housed 50 cosmonauts. However, economic pressures slowed the big station's development. And as international relations deteriorated in the late 1990s, it was cancelled.

The bioagent module was delayed when its rendezvous radar system failed a test, so the unmanned *Progress PM-9* was launched to the station with supplies and experimental apparatus to begin interim bioagent production as a stop-gap measure. Its descent module was meant to return to Earth the first sealed containers of reactive viral bioagents. Then Baikonur was nuked, destroying the bioagent module atop its Proton launch vehicle just hours before its planned launch.

With three cosmonauts aboard the cargo descent module of *Progress PM-9*, there could have been no room for the results of the stop-gap bioagent production; the containers were just too bulky. It can be assumed that all the containers remained aboard *Mir* for possible later recovery.

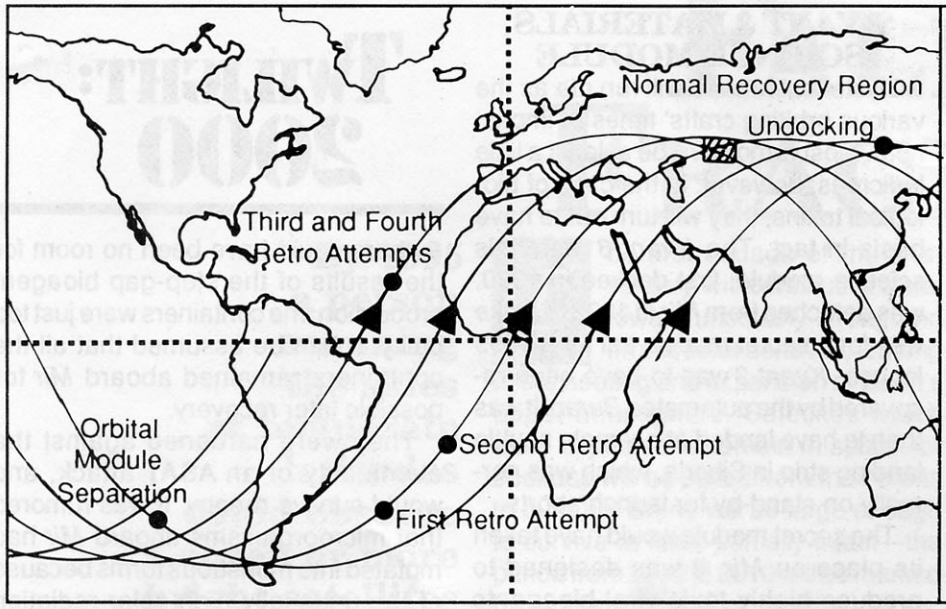
They were hardened against the eventuality of an ASAT attack, and would survive reentry. It was rumored that microorganisms aboard *Mir* had mutated into monstrous forms because of the unusually high solar radiation levels in Earth orbit. Although slimy octopoid beings emerging from the wreckage of the station are right out, it could well be expected that mutations indeed occurred in the sealed bioagent containers, perhaps producing forms even more virulent that those originally manufactured. Alternatively, mutations could have rendered them harmless. Referees should choose the scenario which will make for the most interesting campaign effect.

AMERICAN HARDWARE

Not all large hardware in orbit was Soviet. The American Hubble Space Telescope, an unmanned observatory launched in 1990, fell from orbit in 2004. Fragments of its large mirror landed in the Yucatan; they were collected and kept for decades in local shrines. Some were carved into mythic figures or crucifixes.

The first elements of the American *Freedom* space station, placed in orbit on two shuttle flights in 1997, were destroyed by a Soviet ASAT in 1999. They reentered piecemeal between 2001 and 2007. For decades afterward, any meteor shower became known in North American as "the fires of freedom" in a blurring of the original meaning.

The Americans' shuttle fleet was grounded following the destruction of *Atlantis* in 1998, so no manned space station elements ever reached orbit. *Atlantis* suffered a main engine explosion within seconds of liftoff, and so was forced to ditch in the Atlantic Ocean. Predictably, newspaper headlines spoke of "The Sinking of Atlantis."



Fall Prediction

This diagram shows some *Mir* ground tracks and demonstrates where the *Mir* could fall. Basically, the fall prediction is anywhere from about 55 degrees north latitude to 55 degrees south latitude.

On STS-89, in the last shuttle flight, *Columbia* placed a half-built replacement KH-18 surveillance satellite into orbit. The shuttle was then forced to make an emergency landing which stranded it in Banjul, Gambia, after colliding with a debris chunk. *Columbia* thereby survived the nuclear strike on Kennedy Space Center which claimed its sister shuttles, *Endeavor* and *Discovery*.

ADVENTURE SUGGESTIONS

These adventure suggestions can be filled out to suit individual campaigns by the referee, and locales can be changed, if necessary.

● People are going to panic when these things fall—they did when *Skylab* came down in 1979. Despite the fact that the likelihood of anyone being hurt by a chunk of space debris is miniscule, PCs may find hysteria interfering with their activities. For example, they may be unable to secure transportation out of an area because the populace is fleeing the dreaded doom from space. PCs might even get caught up in a police sweep for looters, or might have their vehicle hijacked or commandeered by panic-stricken refugees.

Alternatively, PCs may be able to exploit hysteria by sowing rumors, adding credibility to their claims by posing as a team to observe the impact. Such rumors could paralyze local authority by setting off a mass exodus. Whether or not the impact is actually expected in the area is beside the point.

When the impact point becomes known, recovery teams will be dispatched. They will represent many different governments and agencies, and none will have cause to love the others. Firefights will break out between the PCs and bands of NPCs, all determined (in the case of the *Kvant 3* materials science module) to seize bioagent containers for their own purposes.

At the discretion of the referee, PCs may encounter a Russian NPC who was aboard *Mir* and returned to Earth aboard *Soyuz TM-22*. His heart will have been damaged by his sudden return to Earth without proper conditioning, and he may be restricted to a wheel or sedan chair. He will have information of use to the PCs, provided they can capture him alive and convince him that they seek only to destroy the bioagents. While in space, he viewed Earth as a whole and thus experienced a change of consciousness. He now sees humanity as one race (he says).

● Another adventure could send the PCs to Tibet to make certain that no bioagent materials had come to Earth with the *Progress PM-9* descent module. This might involve seeking small, make-shift containers of bioagents which could have been stowed in small recesses in the capsule.

PCs might also seek a missing, hardened, purpose-built container following the discovery amid the *Mir* wreckage of the mummified body of one of the three cosmonauts thought to have fled *Mir* in the *Progress PM-9* descent module. The container could have taken the cosmonaut's place in the capsule. The PCs could meet cosmonaut NPCs who fled *Mir* to land in Tibet, perhaps in Chinese or Tibetan custody. The PCs could be accompanied in their Tibetan adventure by the chairbound NPC mentioned earlier.

● The ceramics, plastics, alloys, and superconductors aboard the *Kvant 3* module would be a windfall for any war-ravaged industrial powers which could get their hands on them. A race to salvage the module's remains after its fall (in 2006, in the Bahamas) is suggested.

An interesting twist would be to have fragments come down in shallow coastal waters or in a shallow lake. PCs with aquatic skills would be called upon for their expertise.

● An offbeat adventure would be provided by an effort to ship *Columbia* back to America. *Columbia* was forced to land in Gambia, a tiny west African state where no facilities existed to prepare it for a return to Kennedy Space Center atop a 747. Plans to recover *Discovery* and use it as a symbolic rallying point for the resurgent civilian government of the United States will involve getting it onto the deck of a ship for an ocean crossing. The PCs could be opposed by Gambian officials, New American hold-outs, and a treacherous ship captain eager to sell *Columbia*'s technology to the highest bidder. An astronaut NPC (a survivor of *Columbia*'s last crew) who has gone native and acquired a bitter hatred for advanced technology is suggested.

GDW's module **Satellite Down** will help in capturing the flavor of adventures featuring falling space hardware. Ω

CHALLENGE Conventions

GAMEX '90, May 25-28 at the Los Angeles Airport Hyatt Hotel. The convention will feature all types of family, strategy, and adventure boardgames, role-playing games, miniatures, and computer games. Plus flea markets, auctions, an exhibitor area, seminars, demonstrations, and special guests. Contact Strategicon, PO Box 8399, Long Beach, CA 90808.

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mation, write to Origins '90, Box 47696, Atlanta, GA 30362, or call (404) 457-2490.

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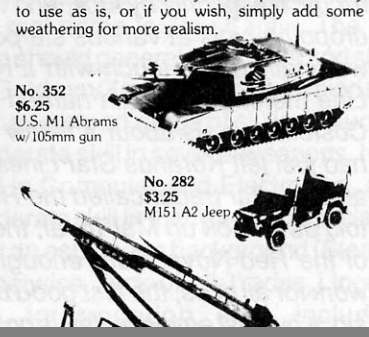
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analytical instrument will reveal that the radiation is coming from the tank of bioplasma. (It is shielded, but a slight flaw in the shielding has allowed the radiation leak.) If the PC making the examination has Demolition skill, he might recognize the wiring to be a part of an impact detonation device. Defusing the bomb will be very difficult. If the detonation trigger has been activated, the ship's computer will begin counting off the time to detonation at one-minute intervals. If the characters opt to dump the bomb into outer space, they will find that the autopilot program has jammed shut all the air locks, and attempting to force open an air lock will most likely cause a drive explosion connected with the autopilot.

To analyze the differences in the bioplasma tank:

Routine, Demolition, Int, 1 min.

Referee: If the character has no Demolitions skill, Electronics or Engineering may be substituted, and the task difficulty will be increased to Difficult.

To defuse the bomb:

Formidable, Demolitions, Dex, 10 min (Hazardous).

Referee: A Destroyed result will cause an immediate explosion. Any other failure result will activate a two-hour detonation trigger.

To shut down the detonation trigger:

Difficult, Demolition, Dex, 10 min (Hazardous).

Referee: A Destroyed or Major Damage result will cause an immediate explosion. Any lesser failure will have no adverse affect. Shutting down the detonation trigger will not deactivate the bomb, and the referee may need to remind the player characters of that fact. It will merely shut off the trigger and reset its counter, leaving the bomb still viable.

WHAT TO DO, WHAT TO DO

If the adventurers succeed at foiling a minor part of Goldwyn's plan and he discovers their work, he will attempt to undo it. He can reprogram the computer, if given a chance, or juryrig another detonator for the bomb. The referee will have to plan Goldwyn's counteractions dependent upon the PCs' actions, remembering that he is clever and well trained. If Goldwyn is confined to his quarters, he will only attempt to escape provided that his knockout gas canister has been deactivated. If he is imprisoned elsewhere on the ship, he will attempt to escape, make his way to an equipment locker in which he has a spare canister and mask, go to his cabin, and barricade himself inside, activating the canister when necessary to give himself the best advantage.

If the adventurers have Goldwyn dead to rights and in a very untenable position, he will defuse the bomb rather than die. He cannot disengage the autopilot until the *Nova* exits jumpspace, though, and he will try and use the time this buys him to reverse the situation.

ON THE RADIO

When the *Red Nova* comes out of jumpspace in the Chwistyoch system, Goldwyn will try to signal to his rendezvous ship via his modified terminal or the ship's communications in the bridge. The rendezvous ship will then close with the *Red Nova* to allow Goldwyn to change vessels. If Goldwyn makes the call, the PCs will have a chance to sense it if they are monitoring the computer or the ship's sensor station. If Goldwyn is unable to make the call, the rendezvous ship can be detected through sensor usage and hailed (perhaps with the adventurers pretending to be Goldwyn to lure the ship in). If an hour passes with no word from Goldwyn, the rendezvous ship will hail the *Red Nova*.

ONE FROM COLUMN A OR TWO FROM COLUMN B

How the adventure ends at this point is dependent on the adventurers' situation:

If Goldwyn is Free or Unsuspected: Goldwyn activates the knockout gas, releases the fake log, briefly neutralizes the lockdown on the air locks, and boards the other ship. The adventurers awaken to find him gone and a Zhodani patrol asking them what they are doing here.

The PCs can try to disarm the bomb (see above) and/or try to disengage the autopilot, which now has them on a crash course with Chwistyoch Naval Base, two days away. Disarming the bomb is one difficulty level easier now, due to the progressive disintegration of the computer's basic programming. Disengaging the autopilot requires disengaging the failsafe first. On the day before the *Red Nova* impacts, all these tasks are two difficulty levels easier.

To disengage the failsafe:

Difficult, Computer and Engineering, Int or Dex, 10 min (Hazardous).

Referee: Any failure result will activate a two-hour detonation trigger. Deactivating the trigger is covered under More Good News, above.

To disengage the autopilot:

Routine, Computer and Navigation, Int, 10 min.

No matter what the adventurers do, they will have to talk to the patrol or face the usual consequences of entering a system unidentified, unwanted, and on a suspicious trajectory. Leadership and interpersonal skills are crucial at this point, as is good role-playing. Given a fairly honest version of what has happened, the Zhodani will at least try to get a ship with some specialists out to the *Red Nova*, cut a hole in the hull and attach a portable air lock, then board her to deal with the situation. While the PCs will be temporarily detained once the experts deal with the problem, after they are interrogated (and have their minds scanned), they will be released with the proviso that they never reenter the system. If the PCs volunteer any useful information about Goldwyn and his plot, the Zhodani will mitigate their terms somewhat and even provide a small reward for the information about the infamous Zigu Zantiri (the referee should determine what reward is appropriate to his campaign—some sort of special knowledge about Zhodani Rebellion activities here might be especially appropriate).

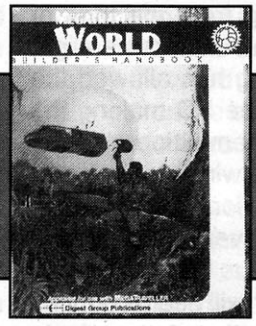
If Goldwyn is Captive: In this case, the PCs may do something sneaky to lure the rendezvous ship in, allowing it to "dock" with *Red Nova,* then making a boarding attempt (perhaps by sending someone disguised as Goldwyn over to

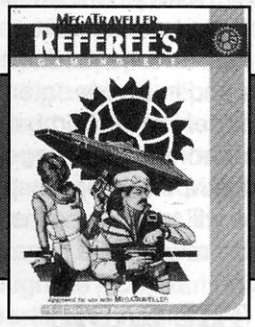
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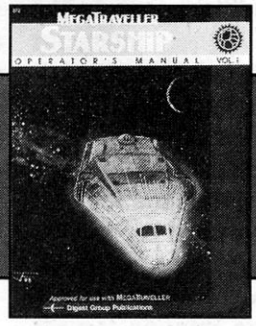


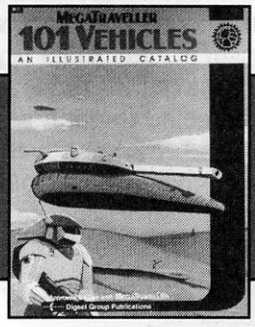
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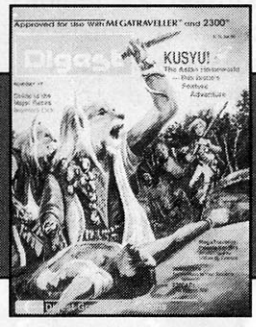


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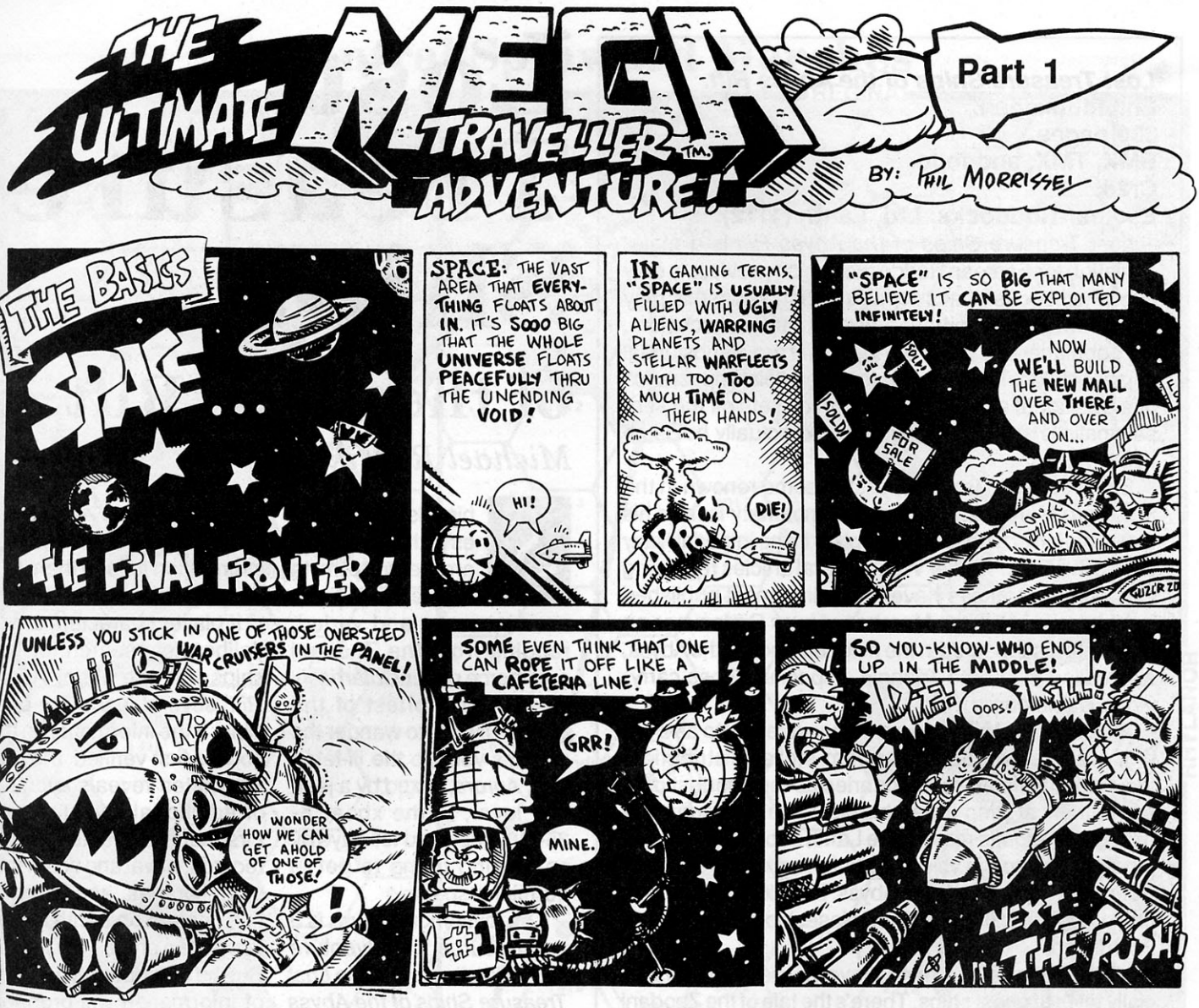
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prepare the way) or attacking it with an improvised weapon. The ship is small, with a minimal crew, and could be taken unaware.

If attempts to take or damage the ship are unsuccessful, it will break off from the *Nova*, putting as much distance between the two ships as possible, then jump out.

A Zhodani patrol will soon spot the *Nova* and begin asking loudly what it is doing in Chwistyoch system. At this point the player characters face much the same options as they would if Goldwyn were free. However, they also have Goldwyn and/or the rendezvous ship to back up their story and to provide a way off of the *Red Nova* if specialists arrive too late or the player characters actively try to antagonize the Zhodani patrol.

Goldwyn will ultimately neutralize the air lock lockdown to transfer to another ship in the face of imminent destruction (he didn't plan this as a suicide mission). As another option, he may disengage the failsafe and autopilot (very reluctantly—he'd rather abandon ship first) if the ship has gotten that close to impacting the base.

Remember the reduced difficulty levels on both defusing and overriding—the player characters should be allowed to be the heroes of this adventure, after all.

The Zhodani will be suspicious at first, but with Goldwyn and/or the rendezvous ship (a captured Zhodani vessel) in their hands, they will quickly come around to a warm neutrality, if not an actively grateful attitude toward Mel and the adventurers.

The Zhodani will be most gracious hosts, although they will not allow the player characters to have a free run of the base.

The referee should work out an appropriate reward for the player characters' actions in the adventure, based on what sort of reward is suited to his campaign—again, some sort of special knowledge about Zhodani Rebellion activities here might be especially appropriate.

Mel's Gratitude: Whatever course the finale takes, Mel will be grateful to the player characters for their help, their excellent work on the ship, and their efforts to save her and everyone aboard while locating the saboteur.

Captain Tovar will pay the player characters a monetary bonus over and above their wages for the voyage (provided that his ship hasn't blown up during the adventure).

If any player characters are receptive or show some talent, Mel will offer to help them get psionic training from the Psionic Institute on Jewell. Ω

Lost Treasure Ships of the Abyss Rift.
Enli Iddukagan.
360 pages.
BMX, TMX, and folio.
Cr25.
Esotear-Roddocks, Ltd, Lanth (1112).

Lost Treasure Ships of the Abyss Rift is a major deviation for Esotear-Roddocks, which previously only published books of academic interest. While this may have harmed its reputation among Imperial scholars, the popularity and sales of *Abyss Rift* are a substantial compensation. The book has the superficial appearance of a traditional academic work, which sets off the sensationalistic style of the author, who actually holds no degree at all.

Enli Iddukagan is a journalist of some renown in the Spinward Marches. His particular notoriety is from his investigation of high level corruption in the Imperial Navy during the Fifth Frontier War. Several articles regarding ship disappearances have his byline, most published in tabloids found in the Marches. *Abyss Rift* focuses on ships that disappeared in the neighborhood of the Abyss, also called the Lanth Triangle, especially those carrying valuable cargo.

Although the Abyss is sometimes referred to as a rift, it is really a product of random stellar distribution. Iddukagan defines its boundaries as the shortest path a hypothetical jump-2 starship can travel in circumnavigating it. It engulfs most of the Lanth subsector, and extends lobes into the Vilis and Lunion subsectors. Seven worlds are contained in the Abyss. Enli Iddukagan points out in particular that the three closest to the center are interdicted.

Many legends and myths involve the Abyss, especially tales of ghost ships. There's the tale of the Zhodani commerce raider *Chtarriash* cursed by a priest of the Stellar Divinity to wander the starless void. The battle song of Jonn Bleu the pirate is occasionally heard on G-band coming from vacant points in space. And ships still log contact with ship registry R-1023, *Errant Aurora*, well over a century after its disappearance.

A widely known ballad, popular early in the 1000s, tells the story of the *Aurora*. The liner's captain/owner, Karl Pitts, had a reputation for excellent passenger accommodations but poor care of his drives. All that kept the ship from disaster was Pitts' romance with Sibunessa, Queen of the Abyss, who lived on an obsidian world. Pitts then fell in love with a beautiful baronet, named only as "the Lady of the Imperial Sun." The affair made Sibunessa jealous. *Aurora* disappeared en route to D'Ganzio, lost to the darkness forever. Sword World myths also mention Sibunessa, but in those tales Sibunessa is either a space dragon or a hideous dwarf.

Stories of strange occurrences seem commonplace among the worlds around the Abyss. In 1072, xboat X-43491 vanished en route from Ghandi to Dinomn. This is one of several xboat disappearances in the Abyss.

Continued on page 32.

Lost Treasure Ships

of the Abyss Rift

Michael R. Mikesh

Ship disappearances in the Abyss Rift are the stuff of myth and legend. Tales are numerous and varied, ranging from the Zhodani commerce raider *Chtarriash*, cursed by a priest of the Stellar Divinity to wander the starless void, to the ill-fated liner *Aurora*, jinxed by a jealous lover, to the xboat X-35626, besieged for days by something trying to get in from jumpspace.

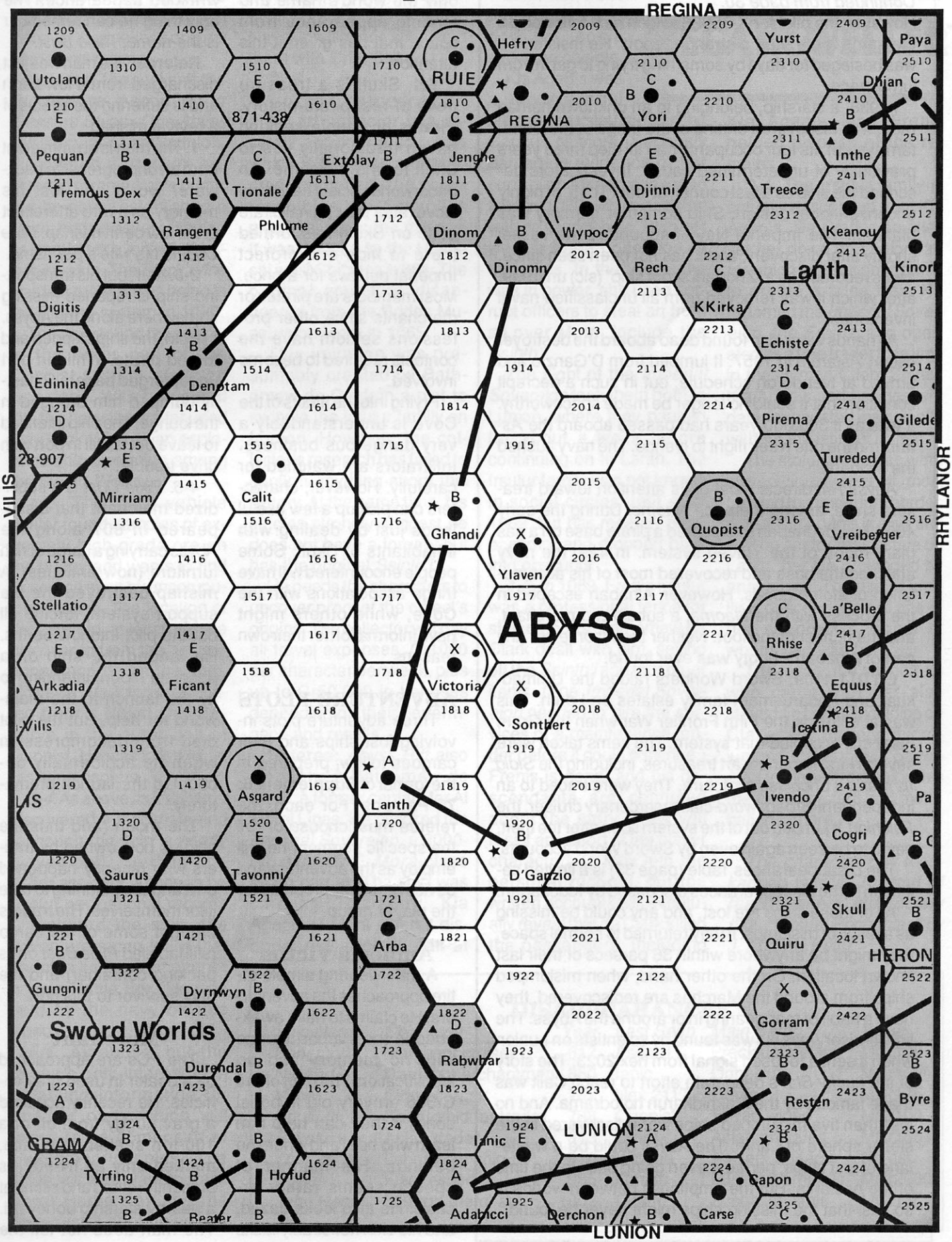
The mysterious Abyss is a great source for adventure and is detailed for PCs in *Lost Treasure Ships of the Abyss Rift* by Enli Iddukagan (see sidebar). Referees are cautioned against creating any unifying cause for ship disappearances in the Abyss that would lessen the mystery and restrict adventure possibilities. Perhaps it is best to treat each disappearance as unrelated to the others; causes may be extraordinary or mundane, but their answer still leaves the rest of the mysteries to be solved.

Finding any of the lost ships will usually be dependent on a serendipitous occurrence. Perhaps the characters stumble into the ship quite by accident. More likely, they chance into a bit of information that, coupled with the *Lost Treasure Ships of the Abyss Rift* book, offers a good lead. But *Abyss Rift* alone will not contain enough information to lead them to a missing ship.

If player characters are to deliberately search for lost ships with the aid of *Abyss Rift*, several leads are possible. If the information in the book is first verified, the process often reveals avenues of additional investigation. First-hand accounts, starport records, naval and scout records, libraries, and information centers on Lanth in particular can prove very useful. But the most lucrative source of information will probably be on the world Skull in Lanth subsector.

Records are repeatedly mentioned about missing ships, relics which pertain to such ships, and people who have been interviewed about missing ships on Skull. Skull originally harbored a pirate base that grew into a prosperous haven before becoming a well accepted member world of the Imperium. Pirate activity lasted there only from 294 to 315. Still, it is perhaps the most famous of the early pirate worlds, having been the subject of a large number of historical dramas, most of which are purely fictional. Tales of characters such as Kaharus, Jammie Eye, and Widerro are as distorted as those of stories from the old

Central Spinward Marches



Continued from page 30.

However, the pilot for X-35626, which next followed on the same route, had a strange report. He insisted he was besieged for days by something trying to get in from jumpspace.

In 938, a starship, belonging to an unknown human race, was discovered drifting at the fringe of the Denotam system. Its four occupants had all died three years previously of undetermined cause. Investigators described the ship as a fast courier, at least TL15, of highly unconventional design. Ship computer memory was blanked. The Imperial Navy impounded the vessel shortly after discovery, and it has not been seen since. It was recorded as a "Zhodani scout ship" (sic) until 999, after which it was removed from all unclassified naval inventories.

All hands were also found dead aboard the destroyer escort *Astaroth* in 1057. It jumped from D'Ganzio and arrived at Ivendo on schedule, but in such a decrepit condition that it could no longer be made spaceworthy. It was as if 300,000 years had passed aboard the *Astaroth* in the one week flight to Ivendo. The navy hushed the incident.

Abyss Rift directs most of its attention toward treasure ships, among them the *Naome*. During the early 400s, Mosu Alhabah maintained a pirate base on a gas giant moon of the Ylaven system. In 429, the navy attacked the base and recovered most of his accumulation of stolen goods. However, Alhabah escaped in the process with the *Naome*, a subsidized merchant, and the richest of the loot. Neither the *Naome* nor any part of Alhabah's booty was ever found.

On 071-1109, Sword Worlders raided the Ummadkuar and Andarusmam family estates on Lanth. This was at a time in the Fifth Frontier War when the Gram Fleet still occupied that system. The items taken were several First Imperium art treasures, including the *Sidig Iis Maru*, a priceless sculpture. They were traced to an independent *Broadsword*-class mercenary cruiser, the *Falchion*. It jumped out of the system soon after the theft, never to be seen again even by Sword World accounts.

The Disappearances Table (page 33) is a limited selection of the disappearances discussed by Iddukagan.

All of these ships are lost, and any could be missing as a result of misjumps. If they returned to normal space, they might be anywhere within 36 parsecs of their last known location. On the other hand, when misjumped ships from around the Marches are rediscovered, they have a habit of reappearing in or around the Abyss. The light cruiser *Imirarka* was found by scientists on Lunion when it sent a focused signal from hex 2023. The story of the *Lucky Star*'s desperate effort to reach Calit was made famous by the Makhidkarun holodrama. And no less than five misjumped ships were discovered in the stellar sphere of Lanth. The Abyss could be a wasteland of lost ships, perhaps even going back to the time of the Ancients. But the emptiness between worlds is so vast that the missing ships might never be found.

American West. It is perhaps only the world's name and striking appearance from space that has given it this attention.

Yet, Skull is a treasure trove of real pirate history. Pirates or people seeking haven traditionally flee to Skull to find welcome. An underworld society called the Cove (after the original pirate base on Skull) has formed there to hide and protect Imperial outlaws for a price. Most members are pirates or merchants since other professions seldom have the contacts required to become involved.

Prying into the affairs of the Cove is understandably a very dangerous business. Infiltrators are watched for carefully. However, characters can pick up a few useful leads just by dealing with inhabitants of Skull. Some people encountered will have fringe associations with the Cove, while others might have information for their own reasons.

ADVENTURE PLOTS

Three adventure plots involving lost ships and their cargoes follow, prepared in the format of **Supplement 6: 76 Patrons**. For each, the referee must choose or roll the specific segment he will employ as the adventure and devise details appropriate for the player group.

Amnesia Victim

A man wearing simple attire approaches the adventurers. He claims to have awakened in the starport lounge with no memory and no identification. The man offers Cr500 (in very old Imperial scrip) if they can help him learn who he is and where he belongs. His manner of speech seems rather archaic. He also looks dazed, and his skin noticeably lacks tone and color, with a gray, wrinkled appearance. The only thing he can remember is the name, *Pixie Dust*.

Referee: The man was just discharged from a low berth and is suffering the effects of a revival mishap.

1. The man is an immigrant from an unprogressive backwater world and lost his memory as a rare aftereffect of the low berth mishap. *Pixie Dust* is his wife's pet name.

2-3. As 1, but his transporting ship is reported missing somewhere along the Abyss. In truth, the ship skipped and turned pirate. While in port under forged papers, it hastily dumped him drugged in the lounge. The ship intended to leave but is still in port with drive trouble.

4-6. Pixie Dust is a subsidized merchant that disappeared in 807 along the Abyss carrying a cargo of rich furniture (now antiques). A mishap destroyed the life support system, forcing all but the pilot into low berths. He landed the ship on a desolate moon, intending to fly the launch to the mainworld for help. But the pilot died from decompression when he accidentally decoupled the launch prematurely.

The moon (and thus the ship) is now owned by traders who recently happened on it and are planning to take it for themselves. The traders brought some of the cargo (still labelled *Pixie Dust* on its packing container) and the only survivor to this port.

Merchant

The PCs are approached by a dealer in used grav vehicles. He recently acquired a grav buggy from off of a 100-ton seeker. The ship, marked only as IN-907, is presently retired and sitting at a nearby starship boneyard. The man does not tell the

adventurers the reason for his particular interest. But he will pay Cr10,000 if they can discover the seeker's original name and registry.

Referee: The seeker is the *Black Wine*. According to *Treasure Ships of the Abyss Rift*, its owner, Larr Varinton, discovered a uranium ore asteroid of remarkable purity. But he never established a claim, and he never revealed its location or even what system it was in. The *Black Wine* was last recorded as being in the Pirema system in 1080.

The navy found the seeker in the outer belt of the Quopist system. Varinton was dead. With no next of kin, the navy thereafter used the *Black Wine* as an espionage ship operating among the Sword Worlds.

1-2. The grav vehicle dealer found samples of extremely high-grade ore on the buggy and wants to find its source even by unscrupulous means. The location of the asteroid, at least, can be discovered from the navigational records on the ship. However, Varinton was mining from a Naval Ore Reserve in the outer belt of Quopist. He was killed while resisting capture.

3-4. As above, but Varinton discovered a legitimate find (although the vein is nearly played out). He died in a belter accident. Although no useful navigational records are aboard the ship, the adventurers can learn that Varinton had a robot partner named Rattle Box. He was sold by the navy on this world.

5-6. As above, but the dealer's only interest is in obtaining information for another party which will prove to be composed of Sword World spies. The spies will also want to track down Rattle Box and the holocrystal containing the ship's navigational record. If the characters capture or otherwise neutralize the spies, Naval Intelligence will award them with Cr50,000.

Art Collector

An art collector has recently acquired a sculpture which is billed as a discovered counterfeit. The object resembles the *Ssinth'i*, a piece valued in the millions. It was created by the Hlanssai artist Chihlons in 861. The original sculpture disappeared from the Brides Museum on Mora in 1065.

This imitation was presumably created by Bathomew de Clark in a plot to swindle the Irsulur family on Lunion. However, the collector's research has failed to confirm anything about this history. At the same time, his studies strongly suggest he does not have a forgery but has the original *Ssinth'i*.

He needs the characters to uncover proof of the object's origins. The collector will pay all travel expenses, Cr1000 per character per week, plus up to Cr50,000 in bonuses depending on their performance and results.

Referee: *Abyss Rift* also mentions a Bathomew de Clark, a former captain for Al Morai Lines. He hijacked the *Imperial Sovereign*, a 3000-ton type MK *Mora*-class cargo carrier. The ship was carrying Secretary Kia Agagis of Mora when it disappeared after its call at Lanth in 1069.

With her went her wealth and possibly some stolen art objects.

Kia Agagis was a very powerful but controversial figure on the Caucus of Mora. Seriously damaging evidence of her corruption started coming to light in 1069, when she fled with de Clark's help. With her went a huge collection of treasures. In the years she was in power, she used corrupt officers to steal art from all over Mora, include the *Ssinth'i*.

The flight of the *Imperial Sovereign* took them both to Lunion, where they paused for about a week before continuing on to Lanth. The Irsulur family was not known in social circles until after 1069, but has recently gone bankrupt and dropped back into obscurity.

1-2. In 1069, Frenis Irsulur was a professional fence for stolen goods. Bathomew de Clark dealt with him, selling off the *Ssinth'i* and four other items. (The *Imperial Sovereign* needed to hire the services of a maintenance tender before it could continue.) Frenis is dead, and his descendants are confused about the story. They will resist any effort of the player characters to look into the personal records, but the written accounts will eventually reveal that de Clark killed the passengers, including Kia Agagis, and Frenis helped dispose of the remains.

3-4. The Irsulur family is actually descended from Kia Agagis. De Clark's shuttles set her down on Lunion, after which he went on to Lanth to create a false trail. He renamed the *Imperial Sovereign*, the *Frenis*, and operated as a free trader for a time in the Human Client States. Kia Agagis and her descendants exhausted their wealth without investing it.

The stolen treasures were surreptitiously sold off, most beyond the Imperium border.

5-6. Kia Agagis is alive and well on her fortress estate on Lanth, her life prolonged by anagathics. The Irsulur family is descended from one of her supporters, some of whom fled with her.

The rest of the supporters who came with her also stayed on Lanth, including de Clark. He merely micro-jumped the *Imperial Sovereign* to the asteroid belt within the Lanth system and mothballed it there. Ω

The character Enli Idduk-aggan is from ***Journal of the Travellers' Aid Society #22****, "Casual Encounter," by J. Andrew Keith.*

DISAPPEARANCES

Ship Name	*Ship Type*	*Year*	*Last Seen*	*Main Cargo*	*Value*
Behemoth	Merchant cruiser	617	Asgard	Precious metals	MCr100
Nilzeng	Darrian merchantman	650	Ianic	Onnesium	MCr1000
Vapor	Pirate corsair	737	Hex 2117	Gems	MCr175
Unuki III	Sharurshid far trader	788	Quopist	Terran wines	MCr100
Sakolusalo	Aslan trader	813	Quiru	Aslan antiques	MCr150+
Thoth	Laboratory ship	910	Victoria	Ancient artifacts	No est.
Lionel	Fleet escort	985	Lunion	Fusion warheads	MCr2000
John Henry	500-ton merchant	1002	Dinom	Zuchai crystals	MCr145

Final Ballot for the

Origins Awards 1989

Presented by the Academy of Adventure Gaming Arts and Design

1. Best Historical Figure Series, 1989
__American Civil War, 15 mm, Stone Mountain Miniatures, Inc.
__American Civil War, 25 mm, Connoisseur, USA.
__Aztecs, 25 mm, Falcon Miniatures
__Republican Romans, 15 mm, Frontier Miniatures
__Seven Years War, Hungarians & Russians, 25 mm, RSM Ltd.

2. Best Fantasy or Science Fiction Figure Series, 1989
__Dragonlance AD&D Figures, Ral Partha Enterprises, Inc.
__Fantasy Adventurers, Ral Partha Enterprises, Inc.
__Official AD&D Monsters, Ral Partha Enterprises, Inc.
__Ork Horde, Warhammer 40K, Games Workshop, Inc.
__Shadowrunners, Shadowrun, Grenadier Models, Inc.
__Skeleton Army, Games Workshop, Inc.
__Star Wars Series, Grenadier Models, Inc.

3. Best Vehicular Miniatures Series, 1989
__Battle Titans, Games Workshop, Inc.
__BattleTech Mechs and Vehicles, Ral Partha Enterprises, Inc.
__Dwarf War Machine, Games Workshop, Inc.
__Harpoon Miniatures, GHQ
__Renegade Legion: Centurion Line, FASA Corp.

4. Best Accessory Figure Series, 1989
__Cities of Mystery, TSR, Inc.
__Colonial Guns and Machine Guns, 25 mm, Lyzard's Grin
__Hovels, Medieval and Northern European Buildings, Stone Mountain Miniatures, Inc.
__Warhammer Mighty Fortress, Games Workshop, Inc.

5. Best Miniatures Rules, 1989
__BattleSystem Miniatures Rules, TSR, Inc.
__Napoleon's Battles, The Avalon Hill Game Company, Inc.
__Soldier's Companion, Space:1889, Game Designers' Workshop, Inc.
__Tactica, Arty Conliffe
__Warhammer 40K Compendium, Games Workshop, Inc.

6. Best Role-Playing Rules, 1989
__AD & D -2nd Edition, TSR, Inc.
__Champions (hardback), Iron Crown Enterprises, Inc.
__Ghostbusters II, West End Games, Inc.
__Shadowrun, FASA Corp.
__Space:1889, Game Designers' Workshop, Inc.

7. Best Role-Playing Adventure, 1989
__Alice Through the Mirrorshades, Paranoia, West End Games, Inc.
__Curse of the Azure Bonds, Forgotten Realms, TSR, Inc.
__Empire of the Witch-king, Middle-earth Roleplaying, Iron Crown Enterprises, Inc.
__The Great Old Ones, Chaosium, Inc.
__The Ice Man Returneth, Paranoia, West End Games, Inc.
__In Search of Dragons, Dragonlance, TSR, Inc.
__Waterdeep, Forgotten Realms, TSR, Inc.

8. Best Role-Playing Supplement, 1989
__Creatures of the Dreamlands, Call of Cthulhu, Chaosium, Inc.
__Imperial Sourcebook, Star Wars, West End Games, Inc.
__Monstrous Compendium, AD&D 2nd Ed., TSR, Inc.
__Shadow World: Master Atlas, Rolemaster & Fantasy Hero, Iron Crown Enterprises, Inc.
__Spelljammer, AD&D, TSR, Inc.

9. Best Graphic Presentation of a Role-Playing Game, Adventure or Supplement, 1989
__AD & D -2nd Edition, TSR, Inc
__Creatures of the Dreamlands, Call of Cthulhu, Chaosium Inc.
__Imperial Sourcebook, Star Wars, West End Games, Inc
__Lace & Steel, The Australian Games Group
__Shadowrun, FASA Corp
__Spelljammer, AD&D, TSR, Inc.

10. Best Pre-20th Century Boardgame, 1989
__A House Divided, Game Designers' Workshop, Inc.
__Guns of Cedar Creek, Simulation Design Inc.
__Napoleon at Leipzig, Clash of Arms Games, Inc.
__Rise and Fall, Engelman Military Simulations
__Siege of Jerusalem, The Avalon Hill Game Company Inc.

11. Best Modern Day Boardgame, 1989
__5th Fleet, Victory Games, Inc
__Desert Steel, West End Games, Inc.
__Europe Aflame, TSR/SPI.
__Modern Naval Battles, 3W
__Red Storm Rising, TSR, Inc.

12. Best Fantasy or Science Fiction Boardgame, 1989
__Battle for Endor, West End Games, Inc
__Dungeon!, TSR, Inc.
__The Great Khan Game, TSR, Inc.
__Space Hulk, Games Workshop, Inc.
__Web of Gold, TSR, Inc.

13. Best Graphic Presentation of a Boardgame, 1989
__5th Fleet, Victory Games, Inc.
__Battle for Endor, West End Games, Inc
__Red Storm Rising, TSR, Inc.
__Space Hulk, Games Workshop, Inc.
__Web of Gold, TSR, Inc.

14. Best Play-By-Mail Game, 1989
__Family Wars, Andon Games
__Illuminati, Flying Buffalo, Inc.
__It's A Crime, Adventures by Mail
__Kings & Things, Andon Games
__Mobius I, Flying Buffalo, Inc.

15. Best New Play-By-Mail Game, 1989
__Beyond the Stellar Empire-The New System, Adventures by Mail
__Orion Nebula, Orpheus Publishing Corp
__Space Combat, Twin Engine Gaming
__Supremacy, Andon Games

16. Best Fantasy or Science Fiction Computer Game, 1989
__Curse of the Azure Bonds, Strategic Simulations, Inc.
__Dragon Wars, Interplay Productions
__MechWarrior, Activision
__Sword of the Samurai, Microprose, Inc.
__War of the Lance, Strategic Simulations, Inc.

17. Best Military or Strategy Computer Game, 1989
__Battles of Napoleon, Strategic Simulations, Inc.
__F-15 Strike Eagle II, Microprose, Inc.
__M-1 Tank Platoon, Microprose Software, Inc.
__Sim City, Maxis
__Their Finest Hour, Lucasfilm

18. Best Professional Adventure Gaming Magazine, 1989
__Challenge, Game Designers' Workshop, Inc.
__Computer Gaming World, Golden Empire Publications
__Dungeon Magazine, TSR, Inc.
__GM, Croftwood, Publishing
__Strategy & Tactics, 3W
__White Wolf, White Wolf Publishing

19. Best Amateur Adventure Gaming Magazine, 1989
__The Canadian Wargamers Journal, The Canadian Wargamers Group
__ETO, Bill Stone
__Savage & Soldier, Lynn Bodin
__Volunteers, The Newsletter of Civil War Gaming
__The Zouave, ACW Society

Signature: _____

Address: _____

These are the final nominees for the Origins Awards for 1989. Vote for only one nominee per category by checking or marking the line preceding your choice. Fill in your address and sign your ballot. Mail the completed ballot to: Origins Awards Final Ballot, PO Box 3727, Hayward, CA 94544.

The deadline for return of the ballot is June 8, 1990. Ballots postmarked after the deadline will not be counted. The Origins Awards will be presented at Origins '90 in Atlanta, June 28-July 1, 1989. The awards ceremony will be Friday, June 29th. Members of the Academy of Adventure Gaming Arts and Design will receive a final ballot in the mail. If you have any questions concerning the ballot or the Academy, please write: Origins Awards, PO Box 3727, Hayward, CA 94544.

TRAVELLER News Service

Anaxias/Delphi (1724 A253A85-D) **Date: 047-1120**

¶During a routine press conference today, Duchess Margaret announced that she is pregnant, confirming rumors of the past several weeks.

¶Margaret went on to say that she is carrying twins.

¶Her husband, Count Blaine Tukera, is said to be looking forward to being a father again.

Korbak/Delphi (0533 A332320-B) **Date: 053-1120**

¶Several recent pirate attacks in this system have caused local naval officials to double up on patrols in the high-risk areas.

¶This additional effort diverts needed manpower away from the rebuilding efforts at Naval Base Kirbak and will likely lengthen the military occupation of the civilian starport.

Knabbib/Core (2115 A331758-F) **Date: 168-1120**

¶Julian Trane, distinguished professor of interstellar history, was arrested yesterday on treasonous publication charges by agents of the Emperor Lucan.

¶Trane's epic historical work, *The Inevitability of Night,* was published clandestinely despite a ban by the Imperial Ministry of Information. That publication led to his arrest on a charge of treasonous publication.

¶*The Inevitability of Night* hypothesizes that interstellar civilization progresses through a continuing cycle of expansion and regression fueled by economic and technological factors which cannot be avoided by any intelligent culture.

¶In his last interview before his detention, Professor Trane commented that he saw parallels between the beginning years of the Long Night and the present Rebellion.

¶Imperial authorities refused comment.

Sharim/Gushemege (1038 A435967-F) **Date: 194-1120**

¶ Doubt continues as to the truth behind the reappearance of Strephon in Gushemege sector, despite the virtually absolute evidence that he died in Dulinor's assassination plot on Capital in 1116.

¶Recent conjectures in the press have provided three distinct explanations for the individual calling himself Strephon. He could be a surgically altered actor, a pseudobiological robot, a clone, or the real Strephon (whose double died in the assassination).

¶No firm evidence has been presented for or against any of these conjectures.

¶Surprisingly, several leading nobles (including Brzk and Margaret) have made public statements leaving open the possibility that the individual in Gushemege is really Strephon. On the other hand, the only thing that Lucan and Dulinor seem to agree on is that the "real" Strephon is an imposter.

Stijn/Verge (1809 A324658-E) **Date: 201-1120**

¶In a lightning raid, unidentified forces attacked this world and sacked the capital, carrying off art treasures, refined precious metals, and technological components, while leaving the city in flames.

¶Initial reports that the forces were Imperial Marines (reflecting their initial radio identification) have been discounted as a ruse.

Regina/Spinward Marches (0310 A788899-A) **Date: 206-1120**

¶The archduke of Deneb today announced the establishment of an Imperial force dedicated to maintaining the secure borders of the Imperium.

¶"After careful consideration," the archduke stated, " the government has determined that a special force—to be known as the Patrol—can best execute the policies of the Domain of Deneb in securing the Imperial borders from the incursions and invasions which are common of late."

¶Patrol ships will cruise the borders of the domain with powers to repel invaders and to pursue them into non-Imperial territories. Armed Patrol ships will carry troop units capable of boarding actions and planetary surface missions. While the Patrol may call upon Imperial and Reserve Navy forces, it will be equipped and trained to deal with most situations with its own strengths.

¶Planetary positions will initially be filled by reserve naval and military personnel. Additional positions are open to enlistment.

¶As an enlistment incentive, Patrol retirees will receive up to 100 square kilometers of land on an agricultural or other suitable world. This is expected to be especially attractive to Aslan enlistees and is being announced in Aslan.

¶The Aslan translation of Patrol is *Trekhyalr*, or *Land Protector.*

Nullian League

Charles E. Gannon

The alliance was formed to provide political and military security against encroachments. But it is common knowledge that the recent turmoil provides a fertile environment for expansionist activities.

The Nullian League is a recently evolved political power in the Nullia and Bruia subsectors of the Hinterworlds sector. Spokesmen for the league claim that the alliance exists to provide political and military security against encroachments from both Margaret's Domain and the Solomani Confederation.

However, it is common knowledge that Nullia and Bruia have found that the recent turmoil created by the Imperial Interregnum and ensuing Solomani incursions provides a fertile environment for expansionist activities.

The Nullian League dates back to 992. The Rim War created an increased market for Hiver technologies, the source of the demand being the advancing Imperial fleets. This meant that the Hiver trade connection had to be redirected from a coreward route to a spin/rimward route. The clever mercantile houses of Nullia foresaw this change and espoused the adoption of a trading league that featured low tariffs and the safe transit of trade goods.

By 1100, the Nullian League had become a large, laissez-faire organization that was the unofficial manager of affairs between its member systems. An impressive bureaucracy had evolved to regulate trade, settle territorial issues, resolve commercial disputes, and even issue a standardized league currency backed by the export economies of the member states.

RECENT HISTORY

At the turn of the century, changes were afoot that helped a small but well organized "hawkish" faction within the league in its bid for power. The turmoil within Ral Ranta space—caused by the discovery/suspicion of Imperial meddling—greatly reduced Ral Ranta's capacity to project power beyond its own borders, whether in an economic or military fashion. The proponents of a more aggressive and centralized league capitalized on this weakness by insisting that the league had to act, if only in self-defense. If Ral Ranta dissolved into a civil war, it was conceivable that rogue military units would split off and begin wreaking havoc in neighboring space. Proponents suggested that the league begin to coordinate its activities to protect against this potential threat.

Almost as important was the sudden and aggressive growth of the Anubian Trade Coalition, which was able to pull off a string of major trading coups from 1080 to 1100. The league hawks beat the drums of warning, claiming that the ATC had begun to wage an undeclared economic war against the Nullian League, which merchants were willing to believe as they saw trade shift away from Beyerly's Path to the Bruia Diagonal and Alike Run (see **Challenge 39**).

Last, the increasing distrust of the Outcasts of the Whispering Sky had begun to result in ever-chillier relations between the mercantile communities of these two powers.

In brief, the stage was set for a takeover by reactionary and adventuristic elements, which is what transpired from 1100 to 1110. During this time, Drastur Kelbis of Nullia rose to preeminence in the league's Head Council, which slowly began to usurp powers of sovereignty over the member systems. Supported by Nullia and Bruia, he easily brushed aside the little resistance he encountered.

When news of Strephon's assassination reached the Hinterworlds, the league shook off any final pretense of being an alliance. By 1119, it emerged as a fully integrated multisystem state ready to compete economically and militarily with any and all rivals.

The central government of the Nullian League is the General Committee, which was originally the trading advisory council that adjudicated trade disputes and other financial matters. It has become a true governing body, led by the ministers who serve on the Senior Committee. The number of seats (and therefore, votes) that a system has on the General Committee is determined by economic production, population, and tech level. Obviously, Nullia and Bruia dominate both the General and Senior committees.

POWER

The Nullian League enjoys a fairly high standard of living for the Hinterworlds, and the combined industrial weight of Nullia and Bruia makes it politically formidable, if compact.

As in the Imperium, military forces are broken into two general categories: league forces and planetary forces. League forces are specially selected troops from the various member systems, equipped to TL12-13 standards. Planetary forces are the equivalent of Imperial colonial forces, although those of Nullia and Bruia are highly capable. All planetary forces are equipped in accordance with indigenous tech levels.

Unlike the Imperium, the league places a higher reliance on planetary forces, largely because the league is determined to keep league forces as a strategic resource. As a result, the league's recent conquests have followed a predictable pattern.

Either league forces or high-quality, high-tech planetary forces assault a "rebellious system." Once its resistance has

been broken (usually a *very* short affair), planetary forces are brought in to take over the tasks of consolidation and occupation.

Another key instrument in the Nullian League's methodology of conquest and control is the notorious Explorer Service. An outgrowth of the old League Commerce Security Bureau, the Explorers are ostensibly modeled along the lines of the Imperial Scout Service but function more like security police. While the Explorers do serve functions such as mail protection, execution of high-priority courier missions, first contact, and even observation and analysis of cultures, they have a decidedly paramilitary bent.

Their bases are quite capable of serving as naval refit and repair stations.

THE MEMBER SYSTEMS

The Nullian League is divided into two administrative districts, one under Nullian jurisdiction, the other under Bruian control. The member systems subject to each are as follows: Under Nullian control are Hugus, Riies, Sigam, Ane, Meadow, Uga, and Angerhelm (conquest underway). Under Bruian control are Rouen, Orphan, Greene, Hood, Branch, Lastop, Horton, Shugii, and Stailveiki.

However, such membership is not always willing and is not always peaceful. In order to provide referees with a deeper understanding of the status of the Nullian League (and to spark ideas for adventures), a brief rundown of the status of each of the subordinate member systems follows.

Hugus: Joined willingly. Hugus accepted offers of tech infusion and a large cut of tariffs from any trade that came along Beyerly's Path from the Old Expanses Sector. Note that Hugus supported the invasion of Riies, having seen its larger rival as an impediment to its own development.

Riies: Conquered in 1119. The most aggressive—and surprising—league move was the unexpected blitzkrieg seizure of Riies. The resistance was fierce and continues as a vicious underground movement, but the surprise attack by league units with a five tech level advantage made the conventional hostilities both one-sided and short-lived. Control is proving to be difficult, despite league attempts to offer economic incentives for those who are willing to cooperate with the new order.

Sigam: A long-standing member. Sigam was coopted into the inner circles of league leadership and is supported with various technological and economic incentives.

Ane: Occupied. Ane's independence-minded populace considered withdrawing from the league in 1118, but a league "peacekeeping" force arrived to prevent any "radical disruption of the current order." While there is no violence at present, there is considerable resentment.

Meadow: Old member. A long-time rival of Ane, Meadow profited from its neighbor's misfortune by offering its full cooperation to the league. As a result, Meadow has been richly rewarded with preferred trade status and a recent infusion of TL8 technology.

Uga: Conquered/occupied. Uga was "offered" membership in 1117. Although the central republican government and general populace rejected the idea, a shrewd group of merchants staged an unexpected coup and then "accepted" the league offer.

League forces were on site within four hours, locking the new regime into place (Uga effectively has a government statistic of 3). While open rebellion is futile, acts of sabotage and terrorism are not infrequent.

Angerhelm: Conquest underway. Angerhelm—a rich prize that enjoys a strategically important proximity to Outcast space—is currently under assault by league forces. Having learned from the fate of Riies, the Angerhelmans avoided a general fleet action and are continuing to resist from hidden bases in their Oort cloud. On the main planet, a well organized resistance is making postlanding consolidation difficult for league forces.

Rouen: A colony of Bruia.

Orphan: A colony of Bruia.

Greene: Old member system. Greene, like Sigam, was coopted into the inner sanctums of league power and politics, then richly rewarded for its cooperation. Greene is currently undergoing a starport upgrade to factor B, subsidized by Bruian merchants.

Hood: Occupied. The tiny population of this planet (67) had no choice regarding its fate. A Bruian colony ship landed in 1119 with 300 independent colonists who immediately announced their intention to join the league. The original inhabitants—outnumbered and out-teched—have held their tongue, but seethe with the desire to get their world back.

Branch: Joined. Branch, noting the fate of Hood months before, decided to accept the (unwelcome) inevitable, and joined the league voluntarily. The people are angry with their government, which is attempting to console them with the ongoing Bruian program to boost the local tech level to 5.

Lastop: Old member system. The oligarchy of Lastop decided to entrench its position by buying into the Nullian League's full centralization. As with all the cooperative systems, it is enjoying a current upswing in trade and technology. A starport upgrade program is already underway.

Horton: Joined in a general vote. Slightly more than half the inhabitants voted to join the league (although there is now some dispute as to whether the league representatives really explained what membership would entail). Life continues as normal on this backwater planet. Grumbling is not serious.

Shugii: Conquered. These fiercely independent people actually attempted to resist a Bruian invasion with disastrous results. The 20,000 casualties inflicted in the three-day "war" are now revered as martyrs by the inhabitants. The league occupation forces are continually harassed, and complete control of the countryside remains an elusive objective.

Stailveiki: Conquered. Another fiercely independent system, this "shareholder democracy" sent the first league envoys back to Bruia with jeers and catcalls. However, when a league cruiser—armed with a particle beam spinal weapon—appeared in orbit over the Stailveiki vacuum world home, Stailveiki had no choice but to submit. Ω

For adventure ideas in the Hinterworlds sector, see "Portfolio of Patrons" on page 38.

Portfolio of Patrons

For Intelligence Contracts in the Hinterworlds

You know those stupid spy books where the hero always says something like, "The moment I saw them, I knew they meant trouble"? Well, that's a lot of bunk. In this business, everybody *looks like trouble. And their looks usually do* not *deceive.*

The politically frenetic framework of the post-Rebellion Hinterworlds sector offers a wealth of opportunities. With the interests of Margaret's Imperium, the Solomani Confederation, Ral Ranta, and the newly arisen Nullian League focused on this one region, there is action a-plenty for the adventurous.



Charles E. Gannon

The following patrons might be of interest to referees and players who like intelligence work in the Hinterworlds. While the operations presented are constructed for an Imperial-sympathetic player, scenarios can be reconfigured for any other political orientations the characters might have.

Character payment/reward has not been indicated. The referee should assign whatever he thinks is fair and will promote a balanced campaign.

UNSAFE DEPOSITS

Patron: Financier.

Required Skills: Computer, Recon.

Required Equipment: None.

On Mainline (hex 1519), the security officer of the Arkon Mutual Bank (AMB) has a problem. A senior liaison officer from a new competitor—the Transleague Trust of Bruia—seems to be getting inside information regarding changes in the cash position of the AMB's Mainline branch. The Transleague Trust has been able to outbid or otherwise undercut the AMB's operations—particularly when it has been financially overextended. This is forcing Mainline AMB to function so conservatively as to be unable to compete. The security officer needs to have the competitor firm's senior liaison followed and investigated. How is he getting his information?

Variant 1: The rival bank's senior liaison is observed with an accountant from the AMB on several occasions. The senior liaison has some rather incriminating embezzlement evidence against the accountant and is blackmailing the confidential bank data out of him.

Variant 2: As above, but the characters' investigation is all part of an elaborate hoax to make the senior liaison *think* he's getting authentic data. In actuality, AMB is feeding the liaison false data through the accountant. The AMB security officer has correctly guessed that the Transleague's senior liaison will become aware of the players' investigation, which will in turn lead him to believe in the authenticity of the data he's getting. However, he may also feel that it is necessary to throw the players off his track or even take steps to have them eliminated. After all, he thinks he's getting valuable information and will try to remove anything that threatens his access to it.

Variant 3: The rival bank's senior liaison is actually an officer with Nullian League Naval Intelligence. Under the guise of acquiring confidential financial data, he's actually receiving coded reports from another league intelligence operative inside the bank. The accountant is simply an unwitting courier. The content of this intelligence has to do with the productivity reports of confidential

mining and war-production operations in Ral Ranta space. If the senior liaison discovers that he is being investigated, he will waste no time in trying to kill the characters through whatever means are expeditious. The AMB has no idea that military intelligence is involved.

CODE NAME: DAMOCLES

Patron: Army officer.

Required Skills: Weapons, Recon, Tactics, Stealth.

Required Equipment: None.

Imperial Army Intelligence Colonel Aris Alouette wants to hire the characters to save a man's life—his. It seems that the Solomani have infiltrated a deadly "sanctioner" (professional assassin) into the Hinterworlds, known only by the code name "Damocles." Damocles' mission is to liquidate high-ranking Imperial Army Intelligence officers operating within the Hinterworlds. Colonel Alouette—whose allegiances are marginally with Margaret—wants the characters to work as a plainclothes counterstrike team. Since the colonel is a likely first target, he wants the group to keep an eye out for Damocles and hit him first. The colonel will provide them with whatever equipment and information they'll need.

Variant 1: Everything is as Colonel Alouette has presented it. Damocles is very skilled, and he will probably note the group before taking any strong steps against Alouette. He will try to use a decoy to lure the group out of position before actually going after the colonel.

Variant 2: There's one little inaccuracy in the colonel's story: Damocles isn't from the Solomani side of the border. He is an Imperial—a retired IRIS Striker operative. Or at least he was, before the colonel and a number of others sent him on what was to be a suicide mission. The only problem is that Damocles survived it. Now he doesn't care about politics; he just wants revenge against the cold-blooded intelligence officers who set him up to die. Damocles' personality and methods are up to the referee to determine. Damocles may be half mad, or coolly logical and sane. He may delight in trying to get rid of the group members one by one before going after the colonel, or he may try to contact the adventurers in order to explain the situation and warn them off—he has no quarrel with them.

WHAT THE MARKET WILL BEAR

Patron: Spy.

Required Skills: Pilot, Nav, Recon, Sensor Ops.

Required Equipment: Starship (any kind).

The characters are approached by an Imperial (Margaret) Army Intelligence official who has a need for their services. Specifically, he wants to hire a team of people to make the rounds of the Nullian League's starports to find out what new facilities are being built there. He's especially interested in those which have a military use, particularly new depots, refueling facilities, and defense installations. The PCs will travel undercover, posing as cargo speculators conducting a survey of local market conditions. While they're carrying out the tasks required to maintain their cover, the adventurers should also be poking around with some fairly sophisticated sensor gear that the intelligence official will provide them with.

Variant 1: Everything is as presented. The characters will find that military security is tightest at two starbases (referee's choice), where—if they're lucky and a little daring—they can find that new underground storage facilities for missiles are being built.

Variant 2: As above, but what the PCs are really doing is collecting coded information for the intelligence official. Some of the trade information they're collecting at every port is actually coded reports from agents on those worlds. Nullian League Intelligence officials may or may not become aware that this is happening. If they do, they'll come after the group with everything they have.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Patron: Navy officer.

Required Skills: Ship's Boat, Computer, Demolitions, Vacc Suit.

Required Equipment: None.

The group is approached by a Ral Rantan Navy captain, Artur Cottbus. He says that before his patrol assignment with a 400-ton patrol cruiser, he was in charge of setting up and maintaining a covert refit and repair facility in a nearby Solomani-occupied system (referee's choice of worlds in the Ile subsector/Old Expanses). This station was located on a tiny moon of the system's gas giant and was supporting a number of Imperial commerce raiders operating in the area. However, search sweeps began coming closer and closer, and the Ral Rantan Navy abandoned the base. Now—in an effort to remove the evidence—the Ral Rantan Navy has decided to destroy the base. But it doesn't want to risk putting ships of an obvious military nature too close to the gas giant. Therefore, Cottbus has orders to jump into the outer system with his patrol cruiser and release the PCs in a commercial model 30-ton ship's boat. The PCs will proceed in-system and destroy the base with demolition charges.

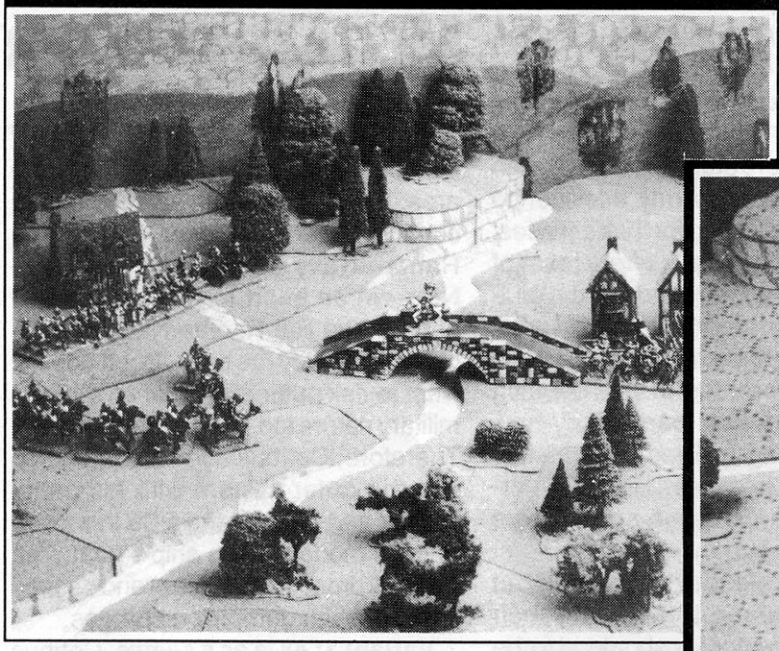
Variant 1: All is as it seems. Cottbus will actually take some risks to get the PCs out of a jam if the Solomani detect them. The Solomani have a couple of armed cutters in the vicinity of the gas giant, as well as a few SDBs lying doggo in the depths of its atmosphere.

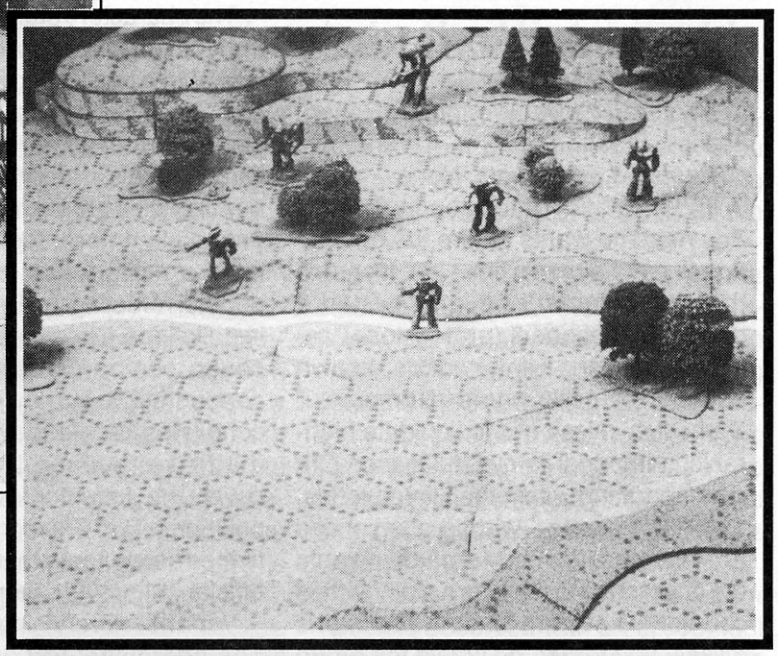
Variant 2: There's one inaccuracy in Cottbus' retelling of events. He was ordered to destroy the base *before* he left the system. But things got hot, and he chickened out. He's pulling this mission off without any word to his superiors (if he did tell them, he'd also have to tell them about his cowardice in the face of the enemy). Therefore, if things get hot, he'll jump back out-system and leave the group to fend for itself. It's easier for him to explain away the loss of the 30-ton boat than to weather an inquiry that would reveal his dereliction of duty.

Variant 3: As in variant 2, but Cottbus is not just a coward—he is a murderer. When the PCs finish their task and return, he'll try to destroy them to remove the evidence—their potential testimony. He has rigged a false transponder on board the ship's boat that will send out a Solomani defense craft signal. As soon as the group is back in range, Cottbus will activate the false transponder by remote control and then give his men urgent orders to fire on what is clearly a "Solomani suicide boat." Ω

For more information on the Nullian League, see the article on that topic on page 36.

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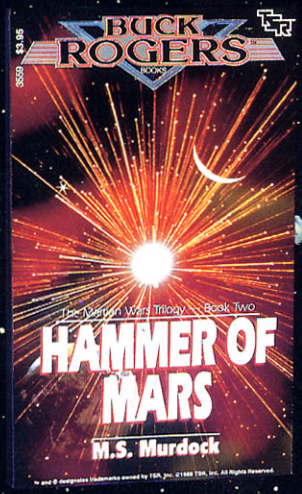
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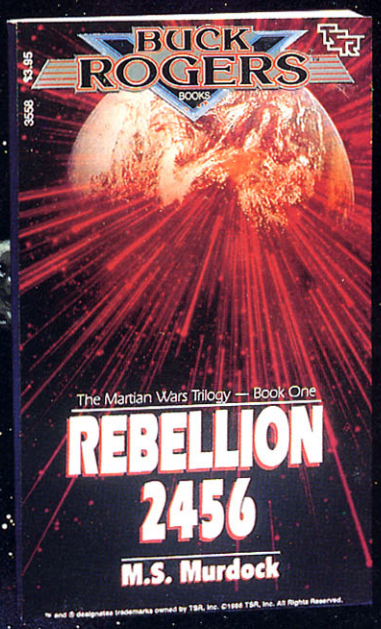
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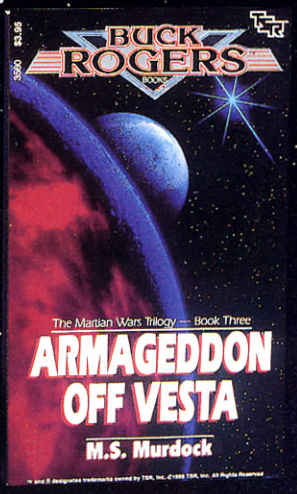
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Very few companies these days make 25mm modern-era figures. More often, the scale is 20mm.

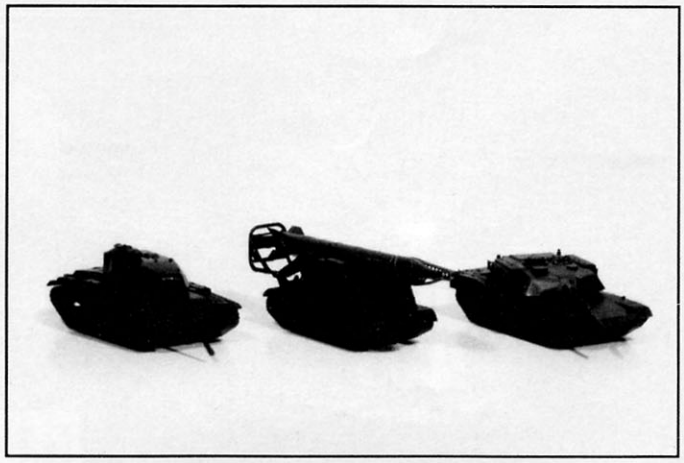
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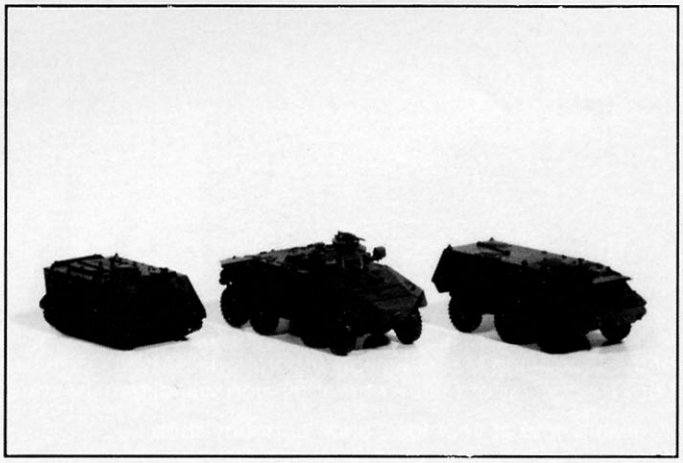
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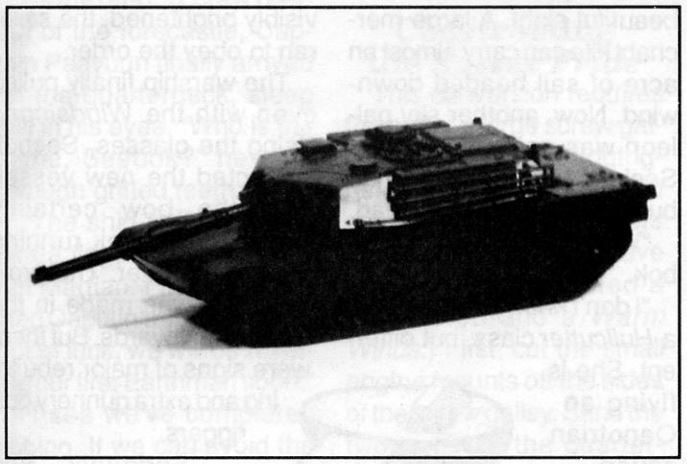
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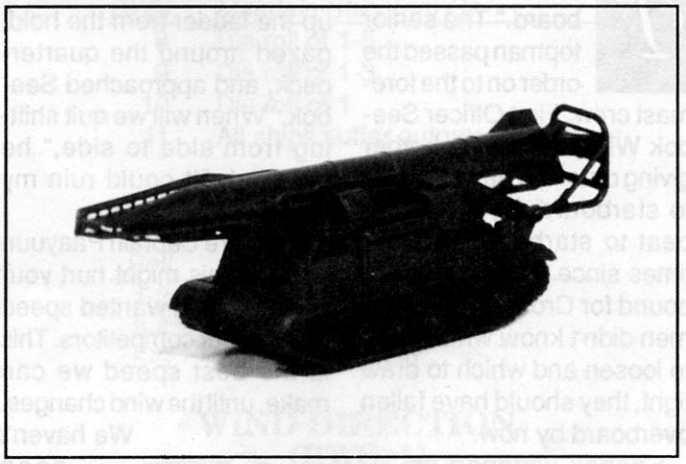
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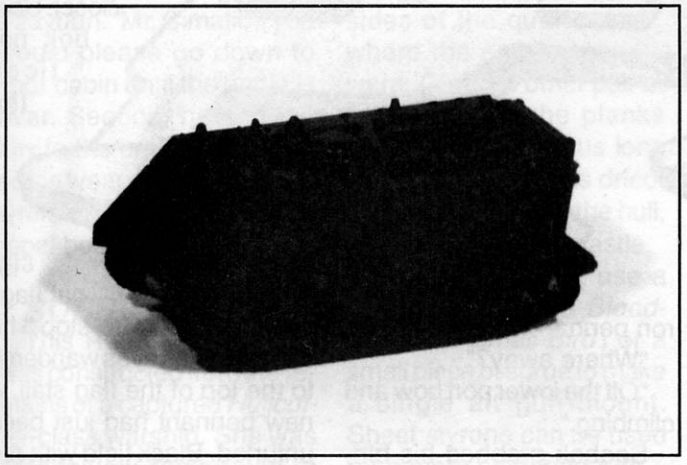
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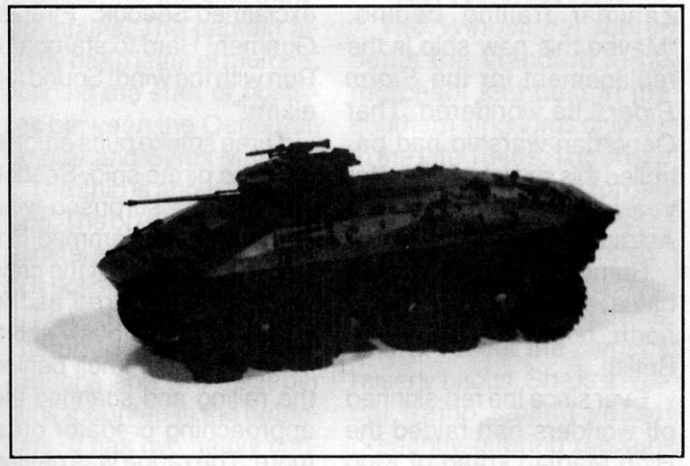
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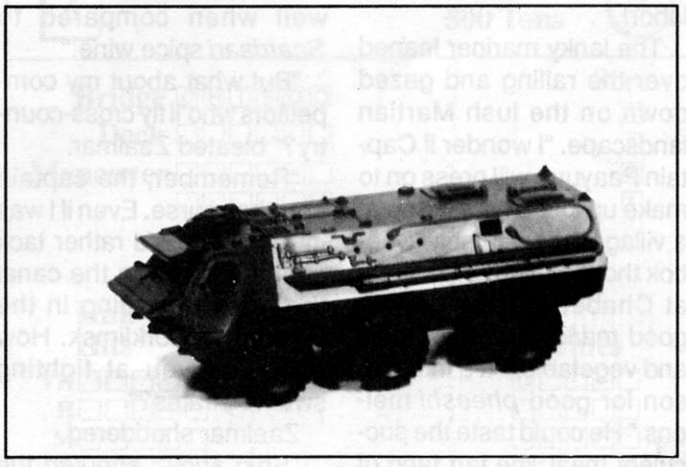
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Windsinger Saga

Van Siegling

"Tack. Beat to starboard." The senior topman passed the order on to the foremast crew. First Officer Seebok Winiipaas didn't bother giving details. They had beat to starboard, beat to port, beat to starboard over 50 times since leaving Fadath, bound for Crocea. If the topmen didn't know which lines to loosen and which to draw tight, they should have fallen overboard by now.

Seebok watched as the helmsman aimed the bow of the *Windsinger* across the grand canal. So long as Gluumen followed the canal by day and the stars by night they would not get lost. No good reason to take sightings. Just keep track of the last village passed. He stifled a yawn and inhaled deeply. It sure was nice having the authority without the back-breaking labor!

The lanky mariner leaned over the railing and gazed down on the lush Martian landscape. "I wonder if Captain Paayuun will press on to make up lost time, or stop at a village for the night," Seebok thought. "Hope he stops at Chabees. They have a good market for fresh fruits and vegetables. It's the season for good *pheeshi* melons." He could taste the succulent meat, the tart tang of the juice as it slid slowly down his throat. "With luck, Aleecki is still the melon seller." He rubbed his lips and chin in anticipation.

Zaalmar Cimatii climbed up the ladder from the hold, gazed around the quarterdeck, and approached Seebok. "When will we quit shifting from side to side," he moaned. "It could ruin my cargo."

"I'm sure Captain Paayuun realizes this might hurt your wine, but you wanted speed to beat your competitors. This is the best speed we can make, until the wind changes. We haven't seen another ship headed for Crocea since we left Fadath. You should be happy we've gained a day over anyone following. And we realize that the earlier your *Hobokii* blend is drunk, the better it is. It does not store well when compared to *Saardaari* spice wine."

"But what about my competitors who'll fly cross-country?" bleated Zaalmar.

"Remember, the captain sets the course. Even if I was in command, I'd rather tack all the way along the canal than risk a landing in the Swamp of Gorklimsk. How good are you at fighting swamp pirates?"

Zaalmar shuddered.

"Ship ahoy," shouted the lookout. "Screw galley. Headed back along the canal."

The *Morning Breeze* had passed them under full canvas, even spinnakers, earlier in the day. That had been a beautiful sight. A large merchant kite can carry almost an acre of sail headed downwind. Now, another sky galleon was going to Fadath. Seebok wished that he had business in Crocea instead.

"Who is she?" yelled Seebok.

"I don't know sir. Looks like a *Hullcutter* class, but different. She is flying an Oenotrian squadron pennant from the jib."

"Where away?"

"Off the lower port bow and climbing."

Seebok grabbed his binoculars and sauntered to the front of the quarterdeck with Zaalmar trailing behind. "Maybe this new ship is the replacement for the *Storm Rider*," he wondered. That Oenotrian warship had patrolled this stretch of canal for years and had gone on to Astrapsk recently.

Rumor had it an Oenotrian battle squadron was sailing north, possibly to meet the British.

Ever since the red-skinned off-worlders had raided the High Martian kraag of King Hattabranx, the Oenotrians had been worried about the devils from the third planet.

"Sadaak, go wake the captain. Maybe we can get a military escort." While Zaalmar visibly brightened, the sailor ran to obey the order.

The warship finally pulled even with the *Windsinger.* Using the glasses, Seebok inspected the new vessel. Yes, the bow certainly showed the sleek running lines of a hunter. The prow obviously was made in the Crocean shipyards. But there were signs of major rebuilding and extra gunnery outriggers.

Suddenly, she turned bow on and surged closer. Seebok noticed the signal flags flying. "Prepare to stop," he muttered. His eyes wandered to the top of the flag staff. A new pennant had just been unfurled. Black field with red skull and cross-bones. "May the Worm Priests take them," exclaimed Seebok. "Pirates! Gunmen! Hard to starboard. Run with the wind! Sound the alarm!"

Three smoke puffs erupted from the pirate ship. Seebok grabbed the surprised wine merchant and slammed him to the deck. Most of the crew instinctively ducked as the shells fell, fortuitously short. The first officer knelt behind the railing and scanned the approaching predator once more. The range was getting shorter. *Sussex Pride* was printed on the side of the

ship's bow. Seebok focused on a rotund man decorated with medals standing on the bow. The color wasn't right. Instead of the usual golden hue, this man was pink and fat. He did not look like any Martian Seebok knew.

As the off-duty crew piled out of the forecastle, Captain Paayuun finally arrived on the quarterdeck, sleep still in his eyes. "Who is the slime, Seebok?" he spat through gritted teeth.

"The ship is flying a red pirate flag, and its name is not Martian. I think this is a Red Captain's ship. If we run out of luck, we will be meeting our first Earthman soon."

"I see we've completed jibbing. If we can avoid the first rush while we gain speed, and if the wind holds, we'll outrun her," growled Paayuun. "Mr. Cimatii, if you would please go down to your cabin until the battle is over. Seebok, here is the key to the arms locker. Get some weapons for the crew while I organize them to repel boarders."

SUSSEX PRIDE

This Red Captain's ship was constructed from the remains of a captured *Hullcutter*-class warship. She was extensively remodeled in the Parhooni shipyards prior to sailing for the Shistomik Mountains. The captain already has a letter of marque, pending the start of hostilities between the Oenotrian Empire and Syrtis Major.

The ship is about 170 feet long. The bow-mounted ram is metal and wood, and ends in a solid wooden keel.

The *Sussex Pride* is equipped with two small cannons and two sweeper guns mounted in the outriggers. It has two heavy cannons and a power grapnel.

The crew totals 46, with 10 gunners, 24 turncranks, six bridge crew, and six deckhands. The ship also carries 16 marines, one of whom is an officer. The *Sussex Pride* can reach Very High altitude, has a top speed of 4 (20 knots), and costs £42,120.

Constructing the *Sussex Pride*

This conversion requires the hull of a large screw galley and two pairs of outriggers from large kites. (You should have the outriggers in your parts box if you have previously constructed a *Glory Sled* and a *Warm Winds*.) First, cut the small engine mounts off the sides of the screw galley. Sand the two guns off the quarterdeck, then sand a curve into the plank ends of one pair of outriggers. Glue them to the sides of the quarterdeck, where the engine mounts were. Glue the other pair of outriggers so the planks make one continuous long board. Once this has dried, glue it to the neck of the hull, just behind the forecastle.

For added detail, use a gangplank (from a *Bloodrunner* or *Small Bird*) or a small piece of sprue to make a single aft gun mount. Sheet styrene can be used for a more elaborate ram.

WINDSINGER

The *Windsinger* represents the standard large merchant kite built in the southern kingdoms of Mars in the late 1840s. The ship's papers have been forged several times to hide "forcible changes in ownership." Her hull is not in good shape, both to discourage pirates and to reflect the owner's miserly habits. She is a typical tramp sailing vessel presently offering passenger and cargo service along the great canals of the Oenotrian Empire.

BASIC WIND SPEED

Roll	BWS
1	Decrease by 1
2-5	No change
6	Increase by 1

SHIP TRIM TABLE

BWS	Maintain Ship Trim On
8	Die roll of 1-5
9	Die roll of 1-3
10	Die roll of 1
11	All ships suffer automatic trim loss

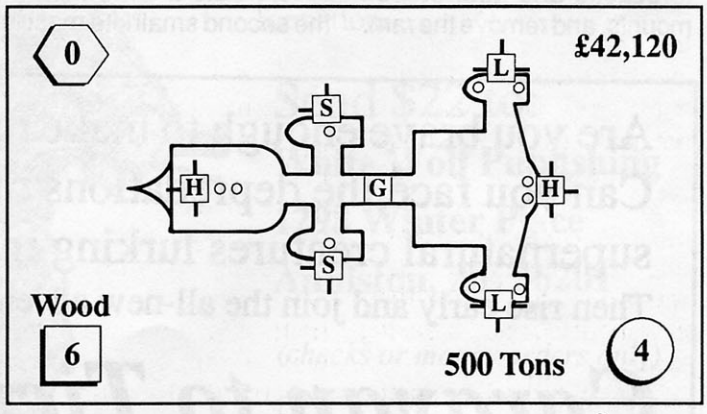
WIND DIRECTION (BWS=1)

Roll	Direction
1-2	Left (counterclockwise)
3-4	No change
5-6	Right (clockwise)

WIND DIRECTION (BWS≥1)

Roll	Direction
1	Left (counterclockwise)
2-5	No change
6	Right (clockwise)

Sussex Pride **Screw Galley**



Bridge C H T S O O
Deck □□□□□□
Maneuver □□□□□□ □□□□□□ □□□□□□ □□□□□□

Screw 4 3 2 1

Hull Hits
VH□□□□□
H□□□□□
M□□□□□
L□□□□□
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Marines O□□□□ □□□□□ □□□□□ □

Measuring 475 feet long by 78 feet high, the *Windsinger* is smaller than the *Warm Winds* but larger than most Martian warships. She is outfitted to carry 25 passengers and up to 1600 tons of cargo. The ship always has 800 tons of cargo and is capable of flying at Medium height. The 38-person crew consists of 16 rigging crewmembers, 16 deckhands, and six bridge crewmembers. The ship costs £90,100.

Constructing the *Windsinger*

This large cargo vessel is very similar to the *Warm Winds* produced using the directions given in **Martian Cloudships.** You will need two large kites and the sails from two small kites.

Cut the two outriggers off one of the large kite hulls. Next, cut the stern off flat slightly behind the two gun mounts on the quarterdeck. Sand the guns off both the forecastle and quarterdeck mounts, and remove the ram. Cut across the mast mounting hole in the forecastle down to a depth equal to the top of the neck. Now cut parallel to the neck from the neck to the remnant of the mast mounting hole. These last two incisions form a L-shaped seat. Take the second large kite and cut the quarterdeck off immediately behind the stairs. Sand the guns flat on the two mounts and glue this piece to the back of the first hull.

Now the hull is ready for the masts to be attached. Glue a small kite's mast into the L-shaped seat. Fill in the gaps with putty. Drill two holes in the expanded quarterdeck, one immediately behind the stairs and one between the aft gun mounts. Glue one of the large kite masts in each hole. You should cut one-eighth of an inch off the bottom of the mizzenmast (the one to the rear) before gluing it in place so it is shorter than the mainmast.

To create a foremast, cut the second small kite mast in half. Glue the mast upright in the middle of the forecastle, angling the sail along the vertical mast.

OPTIONAL RULES

In the battlefield area represented in *Sky Galleons of Mars,* the wind should be fairly stable for all ships. Roll the basic wind speed (BWS) at the beginning of the battle. All kites will use this same BWS, as modified by direction of heading and battle damage, for the first five turns. On every fifth turn, roll 1D6 on the Basic Wind Speed Table to determine if the BWS changes. The effects of the rolls are cumulative. The BWS never goes below zero. If the BWS reaches 8 (or higher), all ships (including engine-powered types and screw galleys) are moved one hex with the wind every other turn. (This can make flying interesting for ships in mountainous terrain.) Also, when the BWS reaches 8 (or higher), all ships must roll to prevent emergency trim loss (see table) every fifth turn.

The exception to the above rules is BWS 4, which indicates gusty wind. Each wind-driven airship must roll a die to determine movement separately for that turn. A roll of 1 or 2 means a BWS of 3; a 3 or 4 means a BWS of 4; a 5 or 6 means a BWS of 5.

Determine the initial wind direction in the same manner as stated in the **Sky Galleons of Mars** rules. On every fifth turn, roll a die. If the wind speed is 1, then a die roll of 1 or 2 means the wind changes one hex side to the left (counter clockwise). A die roll of 3 or 4 means no change, and a result of 5 or 6 means the wind changes one hex side to the right (clockwise).

If the wind speed is greater than 1, then a die roll result of 1 means the wind changes one hex side to the left (counter clockwise). A die result of 2, 3, 4, or 5 means no change, and 6 means the wind changes one hex side to the right (clockwise). Ω

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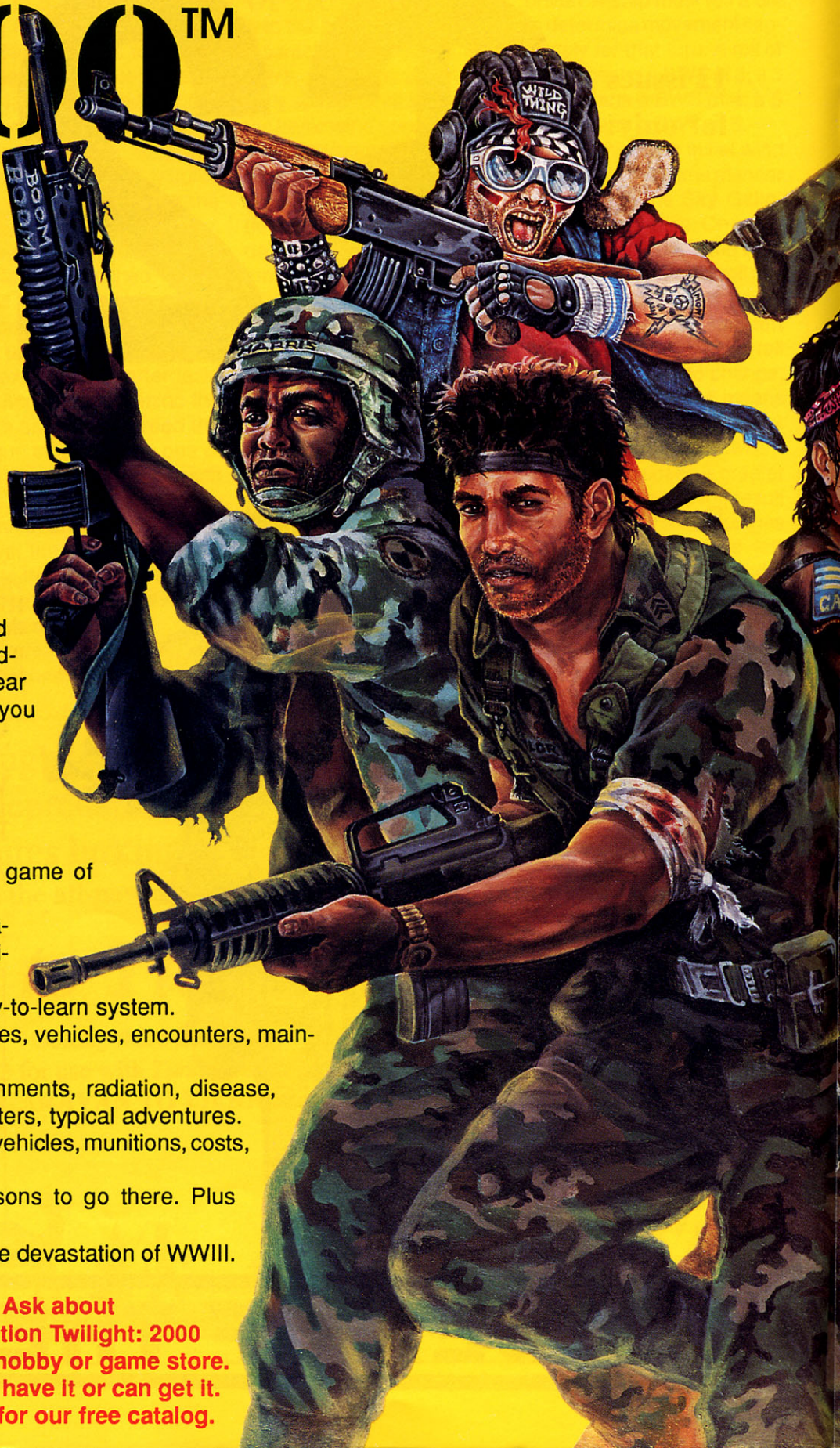
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Dangerous Environments: The **Twilight** rules cover radiation, disease, and battlefield contaminants.

Twilight Cards: Four typical **Twilight** card adventures are included in the book.

Buildings: Eight typical (and recurring) building interiors are included for use in any number of situations: a bar, subway station, farmhouse, etc.

EQUIPMENT: **Twilight: 2000** has expanded equipment coverage, with a more visual presentation and extensive illustrations. Vehicle statistics are based on up-to-date information and the latest intelligence.

ROLEPLAYING: Referees' responsibilities are spelled out in clear language. More material has been added to help referees in their quest for fast, fun adventures.

Nonplayer characters are carefully defined, with instructions on administering their motivations, describing their characteristics, and playing out their actions.

Tasks have been expanded and clarified.

The **adventures** section gives detailed instructions on how to set them up and describe them.

Plus administering experience, the types of rewards to offer player characters (and how much), and motivating players (and characters) to play out enjoyable adventures.

HAZARDOUS ENVIRONMENTS: The **Twilight: 2000** environment has become more colorful—it's a bigger, wilder, more threatening world out there. Referees can set adventures anywhere in Europe with no additional material. Other areas where U.S. troops are stationed are similarly treated: the Middle East, Far East, and the United States.

Background: The opening situation in **Twilight: 2000** covers Poland, with background and details for a "real" adventure with maps, NPCs, the works. It ends up in Krakow, with a lot of detailed coverage of the city.

Service Background: Military service details are included, with discussions of life in the service, definitions of weird terms (like MOPP, MOS, and klick), and explanations of what equipment is like and what a typical character might have experienced.

The New

TWILIGHT: 2000

The boxed set includes a 288-page basic rule book, 20×28" map of Europe, and blank forms.

Black Market

Anything can be had for a price.

Matthew S. Prager

Throughout the history of man, a marketplace has existed to allow commerce, regardless of trade regulations or laws. This marketplace is commonly referred to as the black market, and it spans the entire sphere of man's influence, from Earth to the most distant colony.

CONTACTS

Entrance to the black market is gained through the use of contacts—NPCs who specialize in buying and selling particular goods or services that cannot normally be bought on the open market. Specialty areas include:

Financial Manipulation: Provide money-laundering services, special access accounts, and financial loans (at a very high rate of interest).

Medical Facilities: Medical clinics that provide discreet treatment or services to anyone. These facilities include the black clinics that provide cybernetic implants or plastic surgery without all of the paperwork that normally goes along with such operations.

Drugs: These specialists deal in both pharmaceuticals and biologicals. Some can also provide special labs for the analysis of substances.

Arms Dealers: These contacts deal in everything from surplus military arms to specialized weapons, including explosives. Various military vehicles can also be obtained through these contacts.

Hardware: Dealing in electronic equipment, these contacts can provide special computers, cyberdecks, security and security circumvention equipment, and other items of this sort.

Vehicles: Untraceable vehicles of various sorts (nonmilitary) are available from these sources.

Information: One of the most valuable commodities on the black market, this contact can provide dossiers on people, places, or things. This information can be one of three levels:

Level One: General information that is fairly easily obtainable.

Level Two: Specific information that requires a specialist to circumvent normal access security. Information is more in-depth.

Level Three: High-level corporate or military information. This information is highly classified and is difficult to access.

Forgeries: Specialists in falsifying official papers and documents.

Training: These specialists can provide training in black skills that cannot be found anywhere else. These skills are highly confidential and are not taught to just anyone.

People: A specialized employment agency that provides the right people for the right job. This contact could also be a source of employment for the characters.

To find a contact, the characters must spend some time looking for the specific specialist they need.

Task: To find a contact. Difficult. Streetwise. Two days.

Contacts are rated on a scale of one through 10, with one being a very low-level contact, while 10 indicates a very large organization. The referee should roll 1D10 to determine the contact's effectiveness.

Because black market contacts are so valuable to the player characters, they will be important in an ongoing campaign. NPC black market contacts

In the next issue of ***Challenge****, look for "Hot Stuff," an exciting adventure that drops a piece of black market software into your lap. Unfortunately, you aren't the only one who finds the software intriguing.*

"Black Market" forms the basis of the section on the black market in GDW's upcoming module ***Rotten to the Core*** *(to be released in July), for which the module's author graciously thanks Mr. Prager.*

will add color and intrigue to the campaign. They should have a background, motivation, and skills to match their profession and the situation in which they operate.

BUYING ON THE BLACK MARKET

Once a character has located the appropriate contact, he may attempt to obtain the items he needs. The referee must determine the availability of items. Generally, the more specialized an item is, the harder it will be to find. The Availability Table gives a good indication of the availability of goods and services. To use this table, the referee rolls to achieve the success number associated with the indicated difficulty level on 1D10, then adds the contact's effectiveness. If the modified roll is successful, the item is available.

The price of the item will depend on the characters attempting the purchase.

Task: To purchase item. Difficult. Bargain. 90 seconds.

The referee should roll 3D6, then find the difference between seven and the number actually rolled and multiply it by 10 percent. Use the resulting percentage as a positive or negative modifier to the normal base price of the item, depending on whether the task was successful.

Example: A character wants to buy an item whose base price is Lv1000. The referee rolls a three on 3D6, for a result of 4 (7–3). This number multiplied by 10 percent yields a modifier of 40 percent, which becomes +40 percent because the task was unsuccessful. When this modifier is used with the base price, a final price of Lv1400 is indicated, and the character may purchase the item for that price.

The base price for information is determined either from the normal **2300 AD** equipment lists or by using the Price Table. The referee rolls 1D10 and then multiplies this number with the appropriate number specified in the Price Table.

SELLING ON THE BLACK MARKET

Characters may sell items in their possession on the black market through their contacts. If the characters know a contact that normally deals in the items they have, they may sell them to the contact.

Task: To sell an item. Difficult. Bargain. 90 seconds.

This is handled much like the purchase of an item. Generate a number on 3D6, subtract 7, and multiply the result by 10 percent. This will give a modifier to be added to the base price if the task was successful or subtracted if the task was unsuccessful.

AVAILABILITY TABLE

Item	*Difficulty*
General items and services, level one information	Routine
Surplus military equipment and weapons	Difficult
Current military equipment and weapons, level two information, specialized items and services	Formidable
Special purpose items, level three information	Impossible

PRICE TABLE

Information Level	*Base Price*
One	Lv100
Two	Lv1000
Three	Lv10,000 Ω



Social Class in 2300

Social status can profoundly affect a character's life.

Andy Slack

The **2300 AD** social status information in this article is based on sociological research but has been distorted to make it more convenient for game use.

The Social Status and Monthly Upkeep Table is based on Hope and Goldthorpe's model of the modern British class system, modified slightly to take some account of Gilbert and Kahl's findings of the American class system. It describes the open class society of a modern industrial nation, where class is determined by birth. To find a character's social class, roll 4D6–4 (as for other **2300 AD** attributes), then add one-fourth of the character's education to the result. The reasons for education modifying the dice roll are that people from higher-class families tend to have more years in formal education, and those with more education tend to get higher-status jobs.

NOTES ON THE SOCIAL STATUS TABLE

Generally, unskilled laborers will be SC 2; skilled workers will be SC 3-7; office workers, soldiers or ship crews, SC 3-6; military or ship's officers, SC 7-8; upper-echelon corporate managers, SC 8.

Result: This is the modified dice roll made by the character (4D6–4+1/4 education). It takes into account the effect the average education score of 10 will have (+2 modifier) when assigning a character to a class.

Social Class: This is a numerical representation of the character's social class, much like **MegaTraveller**'s Social Standing attribute. Sociologists usually call the highest status class 1, but giving ascending numbers is more convenient.



Income (Lv/Month): This is mostly derived from the salaries listed in **2300 AD**. In the game, this quickly and easily gives you and your players an idea of how much money a patron *can* offer the group to do a particular job (how much he *actually* offers may be different and will give the players extra information). For example: "The baron's only offering us Lv200 to find the letter, but my banking contacts tell me he pulls in Lv20,000 a month. I don't think he really wants it back." Or perhaps: "Wait a minute. Where did a fellow like Andrew get Lv5000? There's something fishy going on here.")

Upkeep (Lv/Month): This shows what sort of expenditure is necessary to keep the character in the style to which he is accustomed. If the group spends a long period between adventures, say while one of them is in training or recovering from wounds, the listed figure is what they will pay for food, lodging, entertainment, etc. in a month. They can always pay more or less than the listed figure; vast discrepancies can be rewarded with renown points ("Excellent dinner party young Tombs has laid on, Martha; the lad may have more potential than I thought.") or infamy points (Good grief, Elizabeth, you invited the TV people over here? What will the viewers think? At least put the pig in the yard!").

Typical Occupations: This shows what sort of careers are followed by members of that social class.

Class 9 consists of the investors, heirs and executives, who are classed as capitalists because their main income is from their assets rather than their salaries. Land-owning nobility will be in this class.

Class 8 are the higher-grade professionals, administrators, managers, and proprietors of businesses.

Class 7 is made up of lower-grade professionals, administrators, managers, supervisors, high-grade technicians, and middle-grade businessmen.

Class 6 is composed of clerical, sales, and rank-and-file service workers.

Class 5 contains the proprietors of small businesses and self-employed artisans.

Class 4 is composed of lower-grade technicians and foremen.

Class 3 is made up of the skilled manual workers found in industry.

Class 2 covers semiskilled and unskilled industrial workers.

Class 1 is occupied by agricultural workers and smallholders.

If you don't agree with this split of occupations by class, take heart; it changes according to the nationality of the character and the time he was born in. A few hours in your local library looking under "social stratification" will give you some ideas on how other countries view the matter. My table is based on the British system partly because almost all my players are British and partly because British society seems to have a more convenient number of social classes—U.S. research seems to distinguish either too few (five) or too many (dozens).

No modifiers have been applied for Core or Frontier homeworlds. I have assumed that agriculture and mining in **2300 AD** are much more automated than today, and therefore that the lower social classes on Frontier planets take up no higher a percentage of the population than they do today. I have also assumed that some members of higher social classes will migrate to the Frontier to find new country estates, escape from the rat race, or what have you. The higher social classes occupy a niche in society which consumes more resources than those of lower classes, so they feel the pinch of overcrowding and resource depletion earlier (when the pool shrinks, the big fish feel crowded, and some move to another pool). Also, the higher your social class, the easier it is for you to find the money to travel to a new world.

SOCIAL MOBILITY

It is quite possible in an open society for, say, a man born into social class 3 to rise to social class 7 and then perhaps marry someone from social class 8. In game terms, a character's renown or infamy will modify his social class over time. Characters may increase their social class in the same way as they improve skill levels, but they do so by using renown points rather than experience points. This represents the increased respect people give to famous figures.

Renown used to improve social class is not expended but still counts toward the character's renown level, so keep a separate tally of points spent on class. Each infamy point reduces social class by one level (the media and its viewers just love a good scandal).

ATTITUDES

A character's social class reflects the status he derives from his parents' occupations or his own career prior to adventuring. The main use of class in the game is to determine a character's outlook on life. While PCs should be allowed to deviate from the normal beliefs of their class, the referee will find it useful for stock NPCs to have stock attitudes about life based on their class' outlook.

Bear in mind, however, that not all members of a class hold every view ascribed to the class, and one viewpoint shades into another across the spectrum of class.

Manual Workers: Members of these social classes are to a certain extent fatalists, feeling that luck and forces beyond their control shape their lives. They feel that good pay and working conditions depend on union action. They see work as a way to get money to spend during their leisure time and see the unemployed as unlucky. They usually hold liberal views on economic issues and conservative views on other matters, being intolerant of nonconformists.

Nonmanual Workers: Members of the higher social classes feel they have mastery over their lives and feel hard work will be rewarded. They see the unemployed as lazy, and see work as a place to gain respect, demonstrate their skills, and further their careers. They are usually tolerant on civil liberty issues and of nonconformists.

INTERPERSONAL TASKS

A character's class largely determines the respect he is due from NPCs. Therefore, social class may be used as a crucial attribute in interpersonal tasks. PCs may wish to pass themselves off as members of another class, say to infiltrate an important social event or a worker's demonstration; this is a Routine disguise task whose duration is determined by the referee.

ON THE STREET WHERE YOU LIVE

Certain areas of every city are associated with particular social classes. For game purposes, it is useful to think of the average frontier city as being composed of five concentric rings; the innermost is zone 1, and the outermost, zone 5. These zones develop naturally as a result of the successive waves of immigrants as the colony grows. When the city is first founded, possibly near the site of the first landing, the higher social classes live in exclusive areas in the inner city (zone 2), and the poor live further out. Gradually, the richer people move further out, leaving the inner city properties empty. These houses are too expensive for low-income groups to maintain, so they let out rooms in the houses. When new immigrants arrive, they rent rooms in the inner city. The

SOCIAL STATUS AND MONTHLY UPKEEP

Result	*Social Class*	*Income (Lv/Month)*	*Upkeep (Lv/Month)*	*Typical Occupations*
20+	9	15,000	4500	Investors, heirs, executives
17-19	8	4000	3000	Higher managers/professionals
16	7	1500	1000	Lower managers/professionals
15	6	1250	900	Clerical, sales, service workers
14	5	800	700	Self-employed artisans
13	4	800	700	Technicians, foremen
10-12	3	800	700	Skilled manual workers
7-9	2	200	200	Unskilled manual workers
6–	1	200	200	Agricultural laborers

more successful immigrants move into newer, better houses toward the edge of the city, and are replaced by the next wave of immigrants taking lodgings.

The characteristics of these zones and the social classes living there are as follows:

Zone 1 (Innermost): This is the inner business district with the shops, civic buildings and commercial enterprises. Cultural centers such as museums, universities, and art galleries are also present. A few members of social classes 8 and 9 may have apartments here to entertain business associates or to remain near the business and cultural centers.

Zone 2: This is the older residential area of large, once-imposing houses which were owned by affluent people who have since moved away. The houses are in a poor state of repair and are divided and rented out to people in social class 1 or 2, especially new immigrants and indigents with no regular income (e.g., PCs down on their luck). The constant changeover of population in zone 2 leads to social problems and a high crime rate. The zone also has a number of students and Bohemian types who favor the area for its low rents and nearness to the cultural centers in zone 1. If you are using the **Earth/Cybertech Sourcebook**, this is where the cyberpunks and deck jockeys on the make hang out. As you can see, this is the zone where your Streetwise skill is used.

Zone 3: This has a stable population of respectable working-class people (social classes 3 and 4) and some sense of community.

Zone 4: This is the typical suburban area, inhabited by the middle classes (social class 5 to 7). Social life in the suburbs is not based on family or locality as it is in zones 2 and 3, but is based on shared interests (e.g., membership at the same golf club).

Zone 5 (Outermost): This is the wealthy district, where the rich (social classes 8 and 9) live in expensive houses with large gardens.

On Core worlds, as stated in **2300 AD**, people can commute long distances to work via the excellent transport network. Thus, the higher social classes usually live outside the city proper. In Core cities, frequently only zones 1-3 are present, though they are bigger than equivalent zones in a frontier city. In effect, zones 4 and 5 have become houses in the country.

The above sweeping generalizations aren't true for all cities. Sometimes the middle classes move back into the inner city and redevelop it; sometimes overspill estates for workers are built on the edge of the city proper. Furthermore, not all cities are circular; parts, for example, may be crescent-shaped, bounded by the coast on one side.

SOCIAL CLASS IN PLAY

Here are some examples of how social class can flesh out characters, drawn from the troubleshooter party in my own campaign.

Our group has one character of lowly origin who has striven for many game years to pass himself off as a member of high society—he likes adventures that allow him to gain the money to do so.

Another character in the group wants to help the lower social classes in the inner cities and seeks out those who have problems with the underworld or the authorities to help them—this has generated several scenarios where the players did good deeds for no pay at all and still felt sufficiently rewarded.

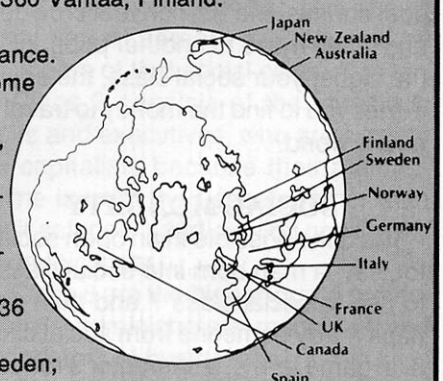
A third character lives in a run-down apartment in zone 2 of a frontier city. Due to his upbringing in the lowest social classes, he feels this is quite adequate ("my family was much worse off"). But several other characters have refused to stay in his hovel, even when desperately short of money.

Since social class under these rules is determined by occupation, it can be used as a guide to a PC's rank within his final career. For example, military officers have social class 7 or 8 as a rule. A PC with social class 7 whose final career was ground military would have held a position in the lower ranks of the officer corps, probably as a lieutenant or captain, but possibly as a major. The number of turning points in his career (and the die roll results for the turning point tasks) should guide the referee in deciding the exact rank held. Ω

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HIGHLAND



Clay Johanson

On the first expedition to Highland, a ravver pack savagely killed the captain. Now, you must discover how to neutralize the ravvers.

There's not really much to tell. The journey from Vega to Highland was a long one, but not because it was a long way or anything. The fact was, the ship carrying us, the Sacajawea, *was an American colonizer vessel, designed to carry hundreds of families to the Frontier. Unfortunately, she wasn't built for speed, so the trip took almost two weeks.*

The Saca*'s current assignment was to serve as an orbital base for the AECA survey team down on the surface of Highland. It had to pick up supplies at Vega, and we just conveniently needed a lift from there to Highland, so there we were—the five of us and 30 or so crewmembers aboard a vessel built for 500. It was eerie, I can tell you.*

Anyway, as we moved into orbit, I was recalling the deal we struck with the AECA fella back at Vega—Hansen, I think his name was. "Easy job," he says. "All you have to do is run escort for the expedition on Highland. They're going to be collecting some animal specimens, and they need you around, well, just in case."

So we took the job. It wasn't until after we were out of Vega before somebody showed us exactly what we were going to be collecting. It scared the hell out of me when Hollings woke me up with a holo of one of those things hovering over me. I about killed him for that.

No wonder the Feds pay their employees so much....

Highland (DM+38 3095 I) was first discovered in 2267 by the survey vessel USS *Armstrong* during the initial surveys of the DM+43 2796 subarm. Following a detailed orbital scan of the first world orbiting DM+38 3095, the mission commander, Captain Gregory Highland,

The Near Now

"... repeat. Is anyone receiving this message? We need help. The invaders are everywhere... reality itself has gone crazy. My God, can anyone hear me? Can anyone help us...?"

— a voice on a CB radio, somewhere in upstate New York

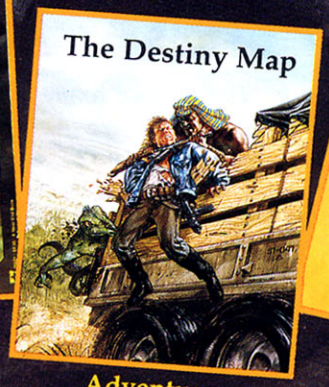
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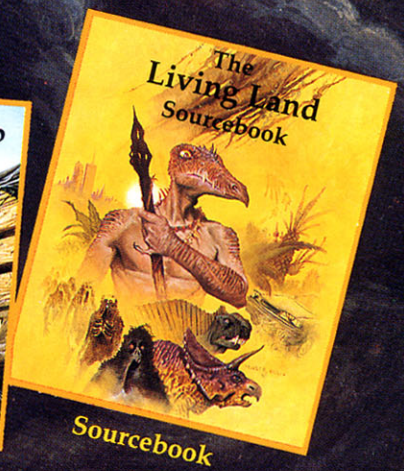
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ordered the *Armstrong* to land on the planet to conduct a firsthand survey. Tragically, Captain Highland was killed by a pack of the native life forms now known as ravvers, and his crewmembers only barely escaped with their lives. The world was subsequently named in Highland's honor.

With a diameter of 10,172 kilometers and an average density of .9 standard, Highland's mass is approximately 42 percent of that of Terra, and its surface gravity is a comfortable .746 G. Almost 60 percent of Highland's surface is covered by water, including the two large polar caps which cover almost 15 percent of the surface.

Highland's land surface is composed of four major continents: three in the southern hemisphere and one in the northern. Much of the surface is covered in deciduous and coniferous forests, with some of the native plants bearing a striking resemblance to Terran pine trees. The remainder of the surface is mainly frozen tundra, and on the northern continent, ice pack.

Highland is a temperate world, with a surface temperature averaging 15°C; this can range up to 30°C during the day and down to 0°C at night. The Highlander day lasts 17 hours and five minutes, and each local year consists of 278.46 local days.

Highland has two moons, Philips and Marten, located at 30 and 45 diameters out, respectively. Both are airless worlds. Further surveys of Marten have indicated that heavy mineral deposits are located just beneath its surface.

One of Highland's notable aspects is its variety of animal life forms. The life form at the top of the food chain on Highland is the ravver, a three-meter-tall, bipedal, reptilian creature which possesses an armored hide and claws. Ravvers roam in packs, usually of 10 to 50 individuals. It was one of these packs which encountered the *Armstrong* and savagely killed Captain Highland. The crew launched immediately and returned to Vega Far Station 5.

Only one expedition has actually landed on Highland since the Armstrong incident. In 2298, AECA set up an exploratory base on Oberlin Island, off the western coast of the largest continent. (For more on AECA, see **Challenge 43**.) The Highland expedition's goal is to gather more data on the planet's ecosystem with an eye toward eventual colonization. One of the things that must be discovered during this time is a means by which the ravver population of Highland may be neutralized.

RAVVER

Basic information about ravvers (*Xenodracoform Highlandii*) is readily available to player characters: The ravver is a reptile-like creature, standing almost 300 centimeters in height when erect and massing nearly 400 kilograms.

Ravvers have two legs, two arms (each ending in a several-fingered hand), and a long tail. Ravvers are usually brown or red in color, although this varies considerably.

Ravver Armor: Ravvers possess a form of natural armor unlike any ever discovered in nature. Laboratory analysis indicates that ravver armor is composed of a mixture of ferric compounds held in shape by a chemical with incredible adhesive properties. Because of its chemical composition (mostly rust), ravver armor flakes off easily and often falls off in large chunks. It is not known how ravver armor is generated, but tests have shown that the material acts as a form of natural composite armor and can withstand hits by kinetic small arms fire at all but the closest ranges.

Ravver Society: Ravvers are known to travel in packs of 10 to 50, consisting usually of an alpha male, up to 20 warriors, also male, and up to 20 females. As many as 10 ravver young have been spotted within a single pack. It is not known at this time how ravver packs mark their territory, but savage combat between packs was observed on one occasion.

Ravver Reproduction: Little is known about ravver reproduction. It is believed that ravver young are born live, rather than hatching from an egg.

Ravver Life Span: The average life span for ravvers has not yet been determined. It is believed that ravvers may live to be as old as 80 local years.

If you intend to play this adventure, stop reading now. Further material is for referees only.

2300AD

The following information about ravvers is currently unknown to humans and is considered for the referee's eyes only.

Ravvers evolved as a burrowing animal, but one group branched off and took to an open-air, predator/pack lifestyle. The ravvers' claws, originally developed for digging, were efficient at bringing down prey. Because of the high levels of iron compounds in their food, the ravvers evolved a method for eliminating much of the iron by collecting it in a special organ (which separated the iron compounds by an enzymatic process) and regurgitating it in an adhesive paste of secretions, enzymes, and iron compounds.

After a time, however, instead of depositing the mixture of rust and adhesive on the ground, they began to cover themselves with it. This primitive armor helped to protect them against the defenses of other creatures and from the claws of other ravvers (in duels for dominance).

Ravvers begin to form their armor almost immediately after birth. Provided for by its pack, the young ravver will consume extremely large amounts of food during the first 500 days of its life. After the food is digested, it passes through a natural filter organ where all ferric compounds are separated from the food. They are then mixed together with an adhesive substance.

The mixture is then regurgitated and released through the ravver's mouth. The ravver applies the mixture to its skin before it hardens. Full bonding takes place within two hours, during which time the ravver remains very still. Following the initial bonding period, the ravver will move all its limbs vigorously, thus removing any armor which may have accumulated near the joints of limbs. For hard-to-reach places, ravvers will often service each other with the mixture.

Although it consists mainly of ferric oxide (rust), ravver armor is very durable, perhaps due to the composite nature of its construction and the resin-

ous composition of the adhesive secretion. Ravver armor is strongest across the chest and cranium, and weakest along the legs, the ravver's lower back, and near the joints of limbs.

Ravver Senses: Ravvers, as burrowing creatures, have poor eyesight compared to other animals, but they compensate for this by remaining largely nocturnal and by making use of other senses. Their olfactory apparatus is quite sensitive and enables them to approach quite close to their prey. They then rely on their meager vision and their ability to sense electromagnetic fields.

This electroreceptive sense is also used to recognize individuals. Each ravver's armor gives off a unique electromagnetic "signature" which is recognizable by other ravvers in the same pack because of the armor's unique shape and electrochemical structure.

Ravver Society: Ravver society is based on a territorial/pack system. Each ravver pack controls an area, usually no more than 50,000 square kilometers in size, which is centered on a geographical landmark, usually a mountain or large outcropping. In any case, the landmark will have an electromagnetic field of sufficient power to allow ordinary ravvers to detect it at ranges of up to 30 kilometers.

The ravver pack is led by an alpha male. Only male ravvers who possess greater than normal electromagnetic sensitivity may hold this position, and only one ravver per pack may be the alpha male at one time. If more than one male is alpha capable, combat determines the leader. The alpha male is instrumental in ensuring that the pack has enough nourishment.

The alpha male of each pack marks his territory with the same substance that he uses to build his armor. In this way, a ravver in a different pack will see a "fence" of magnetic locations at a territorial boundary and will usually avoid crossing the line.

Ravver Reproduction: Ravvers mate once every five local years. One young ravver is born live to the mother after a gestation period of 50 local days and is cared for by the pack until it is 500 days old. At this point, the ravver joins the pack in daily foraging activities.

Ravver Life Span: Although ravvers are biologically capable of reaching over 150 years of age, the average life span for a ravver is somewhere in the vicinity of 100 years—beyond that point, the ravver will probably not be able to defend itself or run down prey.

Combat Statistics for Ravver (Killer): *Number Appearing:* 10×1D6 *Initiative:* 10 *Hit:* Routine *Size:* 400 kg (500 kg if alpha male) *Speed:* 50 m *Armor:* See below *Wound Potential Modification:* +1 *Consciousness/Life Levels:* 10/18 *DPV:* 1 *Signature:* +2

Armor: Because of the nature of their armor, the following values apply to all ravvers. Ravver armor is treated as rigid for damage purposes.

HIT LOCATION CHART

Location	*Armor Value*
1 and 2	0.8
3 and 4	0.5
3 and 4 (rear)	0.3
9 and 10	0.2
5, 6, 7, and 8	0.1

REFEREE'S SYNOPSIS

In this adventure, the characters will be participating in the study of the creatures known as ravvers. The presence of these life forms on Highland is the only factor preventing American colonization of that world. The survey team's mission is to discover a method by which the ravvers may be neutralized, without exterminating these unique creatures. The North American Research League (NARL) believes that extermination of the ravver population would constitute an ecological catastrophe. Rumors are also circulating in NARL's Chicago headquarters that ravvers may be semi-intelligent, although this remains to be seen.

Along the way, the presence of a saboteur will hamper the efforts of the survey team and threaten the lives of all involved. The characters, as a neutral party, will take on an important role in seeing that the survey is completed successfully. This adventure is heavily action-oriented: Although the exploration of new worlds is mainly academic in nature, there are times when new dangers will make life difficult (if not deadly) for adventurers.

VEGA

The adventure begins with the player characters at Vega Far Station 5. How they get there depends on conditions and events within each campaign. As the PCs are enjoying the sights, perhaps even taking in the spectacular view of Vega from the station's viewports, a well dressed man introduces himself. He is Lionel Hansen, AECA station administrator at Vega,

"You come highly recommended," he says. "If you're interested, I've got a job for you folks. Good pay, free transport. Like to hear more?"

Hansen invites the characters to his spacious office near the center of the station and explains further. "As you may know, AECA's been surveying a number of habitable worlds in the 2796 branch of the arm for about two years now. On one world, Highland, a rather important species has been discovered by the surveyors. An operation to gather specimens of this life form is planned to take place in approximately one month. I need experienced troubleshooters to provide escort for the surveyors during the operation."

If asked about the dangers involved, Hansen will reply, laughing, "A few native life forms, that's all." He'll then throw in the clincher: "Payment for successful mission completion will be $10,000. Each."

Perceptive characters may get the feeling that Hansen isn't telling them the complete truth. However, they will also know that it isn't American government policy to outright lie about obvious dangers. While the amount Hansen is offering is more than generous, characters may wish to haggle, in view of the vague nature of the briefing. Haggling is a task.

Task: To convince Hansen to increase the PCs' pay: Difficult. Administration and Psychology. 10 seconds.

Success in haggling convinces Hansen to raise their pay from $10,000 (Lv8000) to $12,500 (Lv10,000). Hansen will steer the conversation away from further discussions of hazards, concentrating on other details of the mission. He will inform the characters that they will be provided with transportation to Highland aboard the USS *Sacajawea*, an American colonizer vessel which serves as the orbital support facility for the Highland outpost. Further information on Highland will be available through the computer on the

transport vessel, and mission-specific information will be given to the adventurers upon their arrival at the surveyor outpost.

After accepting the job and signing their temporary attachment contact (a standard AECA document), the characters are rushed to the *Saca*, which departs the station within the hour.

ORBIT

The two-week journey to Highland is uneventful. Characters will have the entire ship to themselves, including access to its computer. It is not difficult for characters to determine some important details about Highland and its important life forms.

Task: To learn about Highland: Routine. Computer. 1 minute.

Task: To learn about the ravvers: Routine. Computer. 2 minutes.

Success at these tasks allows the characters access to the player information provided at the beginning of this article.

Upon arriving at Highland, the characters are transported down to Oberlin Base by the expedition's *LC-20*-class ship (described in detail in **Traveller's Digest #15**, the *LC-20* is commonly used on the American Arm by many governmental agencies and corporations).

OBERLIN

The characters are deposited at the survey base on Oberlin Island, off the western coast of the largest continent. Orbital scans of Highland showed that this large island was strangely devoid of ravvers, and it was therefore the ideal choice for the establishment of a human base.

The characters are met at the landing grid by Dr. William Garrity, head of the survey team. A tall, patrician man with graying hair, Garrity has been with AECA for more than 30 years, serving in various capacities within the administration. His promotion to survey team leader is the greatest accomplishment of his life, he explains, and he takes great joy in his work.

He drives the characters to the base proper, a 10-minute trip by utility vehicle. During this time, he tells the characters about some of the dangers they will face on Highland, not the least of which is the ravvers. The operation to capture a live ravver will take place in two days, but in the meantime, he says, he intends to make sure that everyone is fully briefed and prepared.

When Garrity and the characters arrive at the base, Garrity escorts them into the mess hall, where everybody has been assembled to meet the characters. The survey team consists of the following members.

Dr. Katherine de Leuw, AECA

De Leuw is a Veteran NPC in xenobiology. When involved in her work, she is very confident and sure of herself. At all other times, however, she is extremely shy. De Leuw is of average height and build. She has bright red hair.

Referee's Note: Katherine de Leuw is the real saboteur. Her real name is Jean Lyles. She has worked undercover in AECA for several years. She affects her shyness so no one can get close enough to her to jeopardize her cover.

Dr. José Cortes, AISI

Cortes is a Veteran NPC in chemistry. He is short and stout, but full of energy. He has a bad habit of speaking his mind, even if it hurts someone. Although he is of Hispanic origin, he grew up in Alabama and speaks with a deep Southern accent.

Dr. Paul Bradford, NARL

Bradford is an Experienced NPC in both administration and ecology. Bradford is of medium height, with fair hair. Although he is the team's ecologist, his primary purpose on Highland is to ensure that only reasonable levels of violence are used against the ravvers.

Dr. Heinrich Christmann, AR-I

Christmann is a Veteran NPC in physics. He is pompous and overbearing, and speaks poor English with a heavy German accent. Christmann is on loan from the Astronomischen Rechen-Institut.

Dr. Angelique Marronne, IEX

Marronne is a Veteran NPC in biology. From France, she is very knowledgeable where biology is concerned. But she believes that "all that is French is good," and all that isn't, isn't. Her views don't fare well with the primarily American survey team. She is on loan from L'Institut des Études Xénologiques.

In addition to the above personnel, four EDiv (AECA Engineering Division) technicians live at Oberlin Base. They are responsible for the maintenance of all expedition equipment.

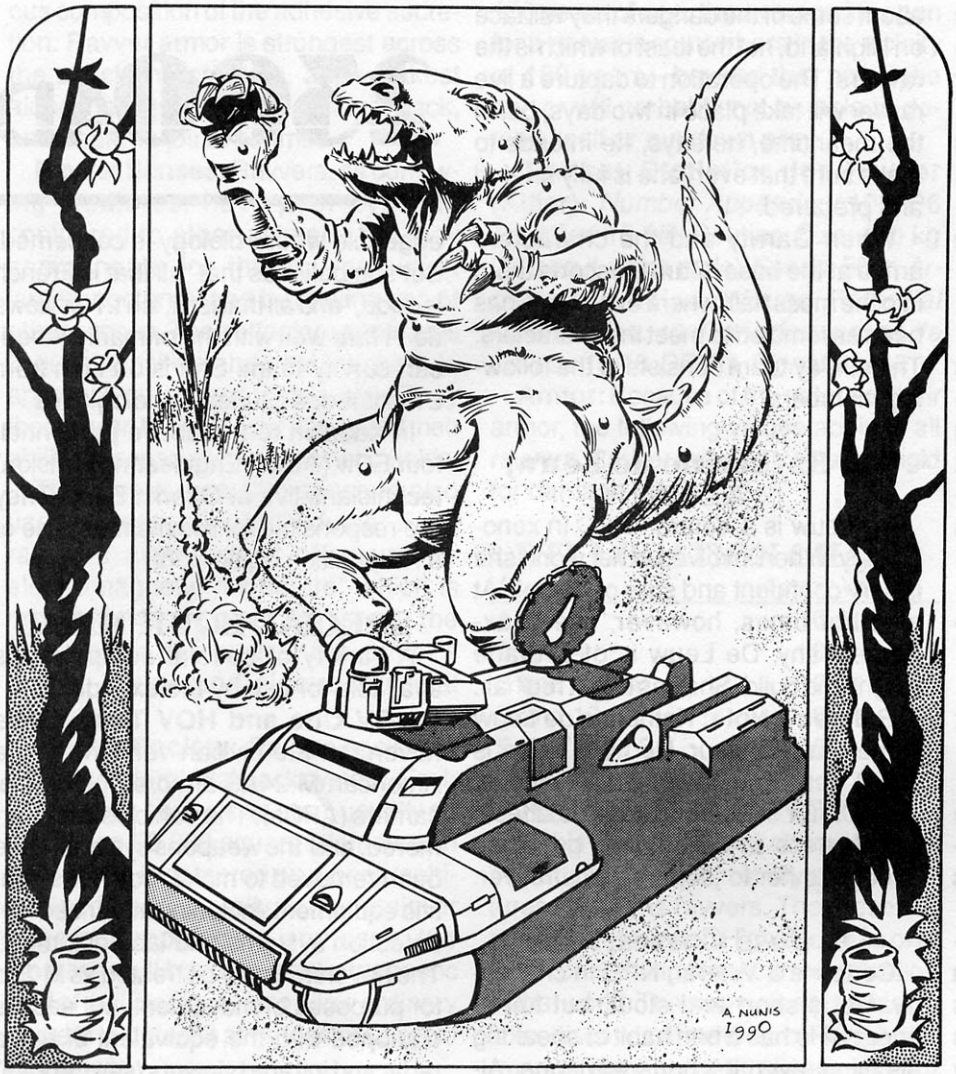
SPECIAL EQUIPMENT

A variety of special equipment is available for use by the expedition.

HOV One and HOV Two: These hovercraft are civilian versions of the American M-24A3 armored personnel carriers (APCs). The vehicles are unarmored, and the weapons systems have been removed to make room for scientific equipment, including advanced life-detection systems and lab equipment. The hovercraft may be treated as M-24s for purposes of movement, but each is equipped with the equivalent of battle radar and infrared viewers (see the **2300 AD Equipment Guide** and **2300 AD Ground Vehicle Guide** for descriptions), and has an all faces armor value of 0.05.

M780 Gas Grenades: These grenades contain concentrated amounts of Amorphan, a tranquilizing gas which until the 2250s was used for riot control. (A notable side effect of Amorphan—the reason it is no longer used—is that it causes a temporary but intense pain in the lungs when breathed.) The expedition plans to use these grenades to incapacitate live ravvers and prepare them for transport. Attached to the chassis of each HOV are six grenade launchers, each equivalent to a GW-12 Granatenwerfer.

Quinn Optronics Semiautomatic Taser ST-1: Two ST-1s are in each of the two emergency kits aboard each HOV (eight ST-1s in all). The ST-1 was introduced in 2298 by Quinn Optronics for use by police forces. Unfortunately, the ST-1 did not catch on: The weapon is difficult to use and has limited utility.



AECA purchased Quinn's remaining stock in late 2299 and equipped many AECA expeditions with ST-1s as an alternative to sonic restraint carbines.

The ST-1 fires two small darts, connected to the weapon by fine superconducting wires. Following impact, the weapon sends a high-voltage, low-amperage dose of electricity into the target, causing neural disruption and muscular collapse. Unlike other taser models, the ST-1 carries eight sets of darts. When all darts have been fired, the weapon is discarded. Characters have no reason to know of the existence of the ST-1s until late in the adventure.

Type: Electric stunner *Country:* USA *Weight:* 3 kg *Length:* 40 cm (Bulk=1) *Action:* Single shot *Muzzle Velocity:* 200 mps *Magazine:* 16 darts (8 shots) *ROF:* 2 *Aimed Fire Range:* 50 m *DP Value:* 2 (stun damage only) *Price:* Lv200.

THE CAPTURE

The operation begins two days after the characters arrive. The survey team and the characters board the two HOVs. The characters should pilot the HOVs and man the gas grenade launchers since the scientists will need to man their equipment. The journey across the strait to the mainland is a short one. Once across, Garrity orders the radar units activated. Almost instantly, a pack of ravvers, approximately 30 in number, is located some 50 kilometers to the east.

As the expedition approaches the pack, Garrity orders the HOVs to make several passes, firing grenades as they pass over the ravvers. As the ravvers are enveloped in the gas, many of the creatures begin to howl in obvious pain as the Amorphan permeates their lungs.

As the scientists listen to the ravvers over the HOV speakers, Dr. Christmann begins to laugh out loud. Gesturing at a video monitor, he proclaims, "See? They're not so dangerous! Let's just call in the army and wipe these miserable creatures off the face of the planet."

Bradford disagrees, threatening to inform his superiors about Christmann's lack of ethics or thirst for knowledge. Christmann, sitting across from him in the HOV, tells Bradford to drop his "all life is equal" sham and grow up.

At this point, a scuffle begins between Bradford and Christmann and any character caught between the two. The characters should attempt to restrain the two men without injuring them. Garrity, meanwhile, tries to calm everyone down.

After about 10 minutes of grenade fire, Garrity orders the HOVs to land within 50 meters of the carnage. Almost 30 ravvers may be seen scattered about, the victims of concentrated doses of Amorphan. The unconscious ravvers are all grouped together, as if they were trying to escape the site. Bradford seems on the verge of tears as he views the scene.

As the group inspects the area, Garrity selects a ravver from among the unconscious for transport back to Oberlin. Cortes produces a large, collapsible polycarbon cage from HOV Two. It takes the combined efforts of everyone there to wrestle the unconscious ravver into the cage. Then, to ensure that the ravver stays unconscious, a gas mask of sorts is slipped over its cranium, and a tank of Amorphan is attached to the mask. Garrity explains to the characters that the mask is designed to keep the ravver asleep until they can fully study it back at Oberlin.

OVERDOSE

After securing the ravver to the top of HOV Two, the expedition begins the journey back to Oberlin Base. Everyone is in a somber mood, especially Bradford, who has been brooding ever since the fight.

Just as the expedition reaches the strait, however, disaster strikes. The character piloting HOV One will probably be the first to notice that the captive ravver is not unconscious anymore. In fact, it is trying to rip its way out of its cage, without much success.

The characters may lean out of their hatches and attempt to shoot the ravver, but the task difficulty to hit is increased by one level as they attempt to hit a moving target from a moving position. If the HOV pilot succeeds at a task to keep the hovercraft steady, the difficulty may be lowered one level.

Task: To keep a hovercraft steady over water: Formidable. Hover Vehicle. Instant.

As the characters in HOV One watch, the ravver begins to rip through the thin armor on HOV Two's roof. Characters inside HOV Two can use their personal weapons against the ravver, but it will cease moving and appear to die just after it gains entry to the cabin.

Following their arrival at Oberlin, nearly everyone on the survey team (especially those in HOV Two) will be in a state of shock. Garrity orders an autopsy on the dead ravver.

EVIDENCE

The autopsy is complete by nightfall. The ravver apparently died of an overdose of Amorphan, Garrity says, but he doesn't know how or why it regained consciousness before it died. "In the meantime," he says, "we should all get some sleep."

Early the next day, Garrity summons everyone to the mess hall for the daily briefing. Garrity announces that the surveyors will spend the day collecting mineral samples since it will take another day for the EDiv technicians to manufacture another gas mask. He tells the characters that they may spend the day in whatever manner they wish.

The surveyors depart Oberlin at 1100 hours and are scheduled to return by 0100. Since the technicians will remain in their workshop the entire day, the characters may choose to search the base for clues as to what may have caused the disaster. The following task applies when searching for clues.

Task: To search surveyor's quarters for clues: Routine. Intelligence. 5 minutes.

The surveyors each have their own quarters. If one of the PCs succeeds at the first task when in Bradford's room, he will discover two important items. The first is a newspaper clipping from Earth, almost six months old.

The story on it concerns a renegade militant branch of the North American Research League (NARL) and its plan to destroy a genetic research facility in the Chinese Arm. The other is a small slip of paper with a single word written on it—betaphthenalycin-5.

Task: To learn about betaphthenalycin-5: Difficult. Computer and Information Gathering. 2 minutes.

The characters may use the base computer to learn more about beta-5. If they are successful, they will learn that beta-5 is an extremely potent psychoactive agent, banned from use almost a century ago.

Additional detective work may lead the characters to Garrity's autopsy report on the dead ravver. One of his notations reads, "Unknown agent present. Unable to identify. Psychoactive?"

The characters may deduce that an unknown amount of beta-5 was somehow introduced into the Amorphan which the ravver was breathing. Bradford seems to be the most likely suspect.

DISTRESS CALL

Just as the characters are finishing their investigation into the mysterious beta-5, a call comes in over the radio. It is Cortes, calling for the characters to bring first aid and fire control equipment to the main base area immediately.

As the characters arrive outside with the equipment, the two HOVs land in the main area. Large quantities of Amorphan gas are billowing from HOV One. The characters should waste no time in evacuating the personnel from the hovercraft. Garrity and Cortes are basically unhurt but are in severe pain, while Marronne has been rendered unconscious by the gas. Bradford, Christmann, and de Leuw in the other HOV are unharmed. After resting for a few minutes, Garrity explains to the party that just after the HOVs began to return over the strait to Oberlin, the box of grenades in the rear of the HOV exploded, flooding the compartment with gas. Marronne was the first to succumb. She fell on top of the container, slowing the flow of gas to the front of the HOV. Garrity doesn't have an explanation of why the grenades exploded.

THE CAPTURE, TAKE TWO

At the briefing the next day, Garrity announces that another attempt to capture a ravver will be made. Marronne, he explains, will remain at the base to recuperate, but enough personnel will be left to make the capture. The EDiv technicians produce the completed mask, and after it checks out, Garrity gives it to the characters to protect.

The survey departs Oberlin by 1200. The plan is to locate another ravver pack, gas it into submission, and capture another ravver. Only an hour of searching is required before a pack is located on the HOV One's radar.

As the two HOVs prepare to make their runs through the ravver pack, HOV One's engine suddenly fails: It is impossible to restart it in the half-second before the vehicle crash lands several thousand meters from the pack.

THE CHASE

The PCs and surveyors in HOV One stand a good chance of being injured in the crash. It is a task to avoid injury.

Task: To avoid injury in a hovercraft crash: Routine. Endurance. Instant.

Failure means the character or surveyor receives a DPV 0.2 hit to a random part of the body. Nobody should be killed by this, however.

It should be obvious to the personnel in HOV Two that unless they are rescued, those in HOV One stand a good chance of becoming a ravver pack's meal. HOV Two will have to land, and most, if not all, of its personnel will have to disembark to help the occupants of HOV One out of their wrecked vehicle. During the rescue operation, de Leuw (aboard HOV One at the time of the crash) will go to HOV Two to get some first aid supplies. Unfortunately for the characters, she will then proceed to start HOV Two's engines and leave the characters and the rest of the survey team. She will use an SST-1, filched from HOV Two earlier, to speedily take out anyone still in the vehicle, pitching unconscious people out the door.

The team is in desperate trouble, with ravvers only a few kilometers away. They have several options.

Radio for Help: Although the technicians back at Oberlin do not have a

vehicle, they can radio the *Saca* and summon a rescue vehicle. It will take time to arrive, though, so the characters may need to take other actions in the meantime.

Hole Up in HOV One: The vehicle's armor is quite thin, and the characters might find themselves trapped inside, so this is probably not a good choice.

Arm Themselves: Some of the characters might have personal weapons aboard HOV One. For those who don't, two ST-1s may be found in each of HOV One's two emergency kits (four total). Even so armed, the characters may see the approaching herd as formidable and combat as potentially disastrous.

Run: Unless the characters have developed a super weapon for use against the ravvers, this option is recommended. If the characters exercise this option, they will probably want to run west, away from the approaching pack.

DISCOVERY

After approximately 20 minutes of running, roll randomly for one member of the team to trip on a tree root, spraining his ankle. As the characters help the individual to his feet, an enormous ravver suddenly appears from behind a tree and attacks. Although the characters don't realize it, the ravver is an alpha male, scouting ahead for the pack. Gunfire will probably have little effect on the creature, due to its thick armor.

If an ST-1 is used, however, the effect will be surprising. Despite the huge bulk of the ravver, it will begin to spasm uncontrollably before falling to the ground moments later, apparently dead.

After another 10 minutes of game time, the party is spotted by the landing craft from the *Saca* (if they radioed for help). The pilot explains, rather quickly, that the team must move to a clearing two kilometers to the north in order to be picked up. He also informs them that a large pack is moving toward them at high speed.

The next clash with the ravvers will be a running battle, with the characters forming a rear guard to hold off the ravvers. Eventually, though, the party will reach the clearing, just in time to rendezvous with the landing craft. On board they meet the U.S. marshal and his squad of officers, on his way down to open an official investigation into the events of the past few days.

END NOTE

As the craft now heads back to Oberlin, the story finally unfolds. After the characters describe de Leuw and her behavior, the marshal's face lights up, and he quickly consults his portacomp. According to his files, Katherine de Leuw is the real saboteur. "Eight months ago, her friends tried to blow up the Manchurian genetics research labs on Chengdu. The local police arrested them before they got away with it, and her name and face came up in the investigation. The name her friends know her by is Jean Lyles—apparently, she's been in deep cover at AECA for several years now." Quickly, he radios the *Saca* to order her apprehension.

If asked about Bradford, the marshal replies, "He's NARL, all right, but he's been on her trail for some time now. NARL fears being connected with terrorism of any kind, nowadays, and they wanted to track her down and turn her over to us. She and her group don't stop at anything."

Arresting de Leuw is another matter entirely. When the characters arrive at Oberlin, they are told by the EDiv technicians that de Leuw has taken Marronne hostage and is holding her in the mess hall, demanding transportation to Tirane.

Because the characters know the mess hall better than his men do and because they are officially AECA field personnel, the marshal assigns the characters to take out de Leuw while his men distract her.

While the marshal and his men negotiate with de Leuw, the characters should attempt to move around behind and incapacitate her. An ST-1 would be an ideal weapon for this task—after all, they can't risk inadvertently killing Marronne, and de Leuw probably has access to much that the police would like to know.

Following de Leuw's incapacitation and subsequent capture, she is herded aboard a landing craft, which is preparing for the trip to Ellis. Marronne is unharmed and relieved to see the characters safe.

Any character paying attention to the surprising effects of the ST-1 on the alpha male ravver will have important information for AECA—how to neutralize the ravvers without destroying them. Something as simple as an electric fence will keep them at bay, especially if it duplicates a signature associated with the boundary markers of a very large, very powerful alpha male. Smaller ravvers will stay away in droves. Ω

This article is dedicated to Dave and Annette.

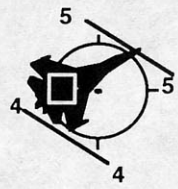
Feedback Results for Challenge 42

A Rock in Troubled Waters (Twilight)	3.68
The Biology of Liftwood (1889)	3.24
Showcase	2.68
Italy: 2300 (2300)	3.59
Manhunt (2300)	3.61
Leathernecks on Aurore (2300)	3.74
AV-90 Marine VTOL (2300)	3.87
Where Ya From, Mack? (2300)	3.56
Pirates of the Blood Asteroids (MegaTraveller)	3.69
From Peace to War (MegaTraveller)	3.33
Imp. Research Station Beta (MegaTraveller)	3.83
Tourist Trap (MegaTraveller)	3.64
The Next Generation Parody (Star Trek)	3.16
Operation Cormorant (Star Trek)	2.58
Operation Pile Driver (Star Trek)	2.75
Federation Merchants' Log (Star Trek)	2.86
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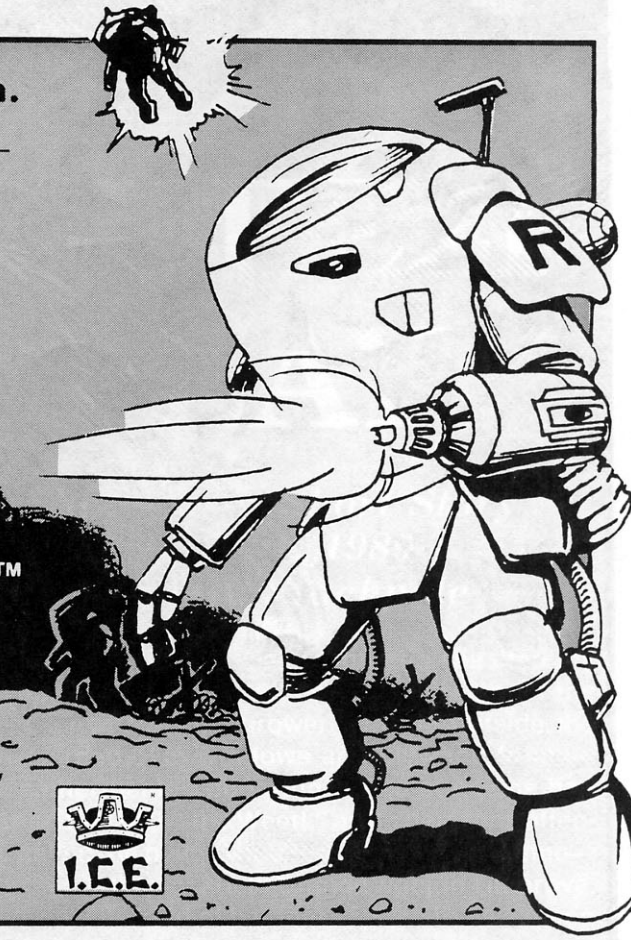
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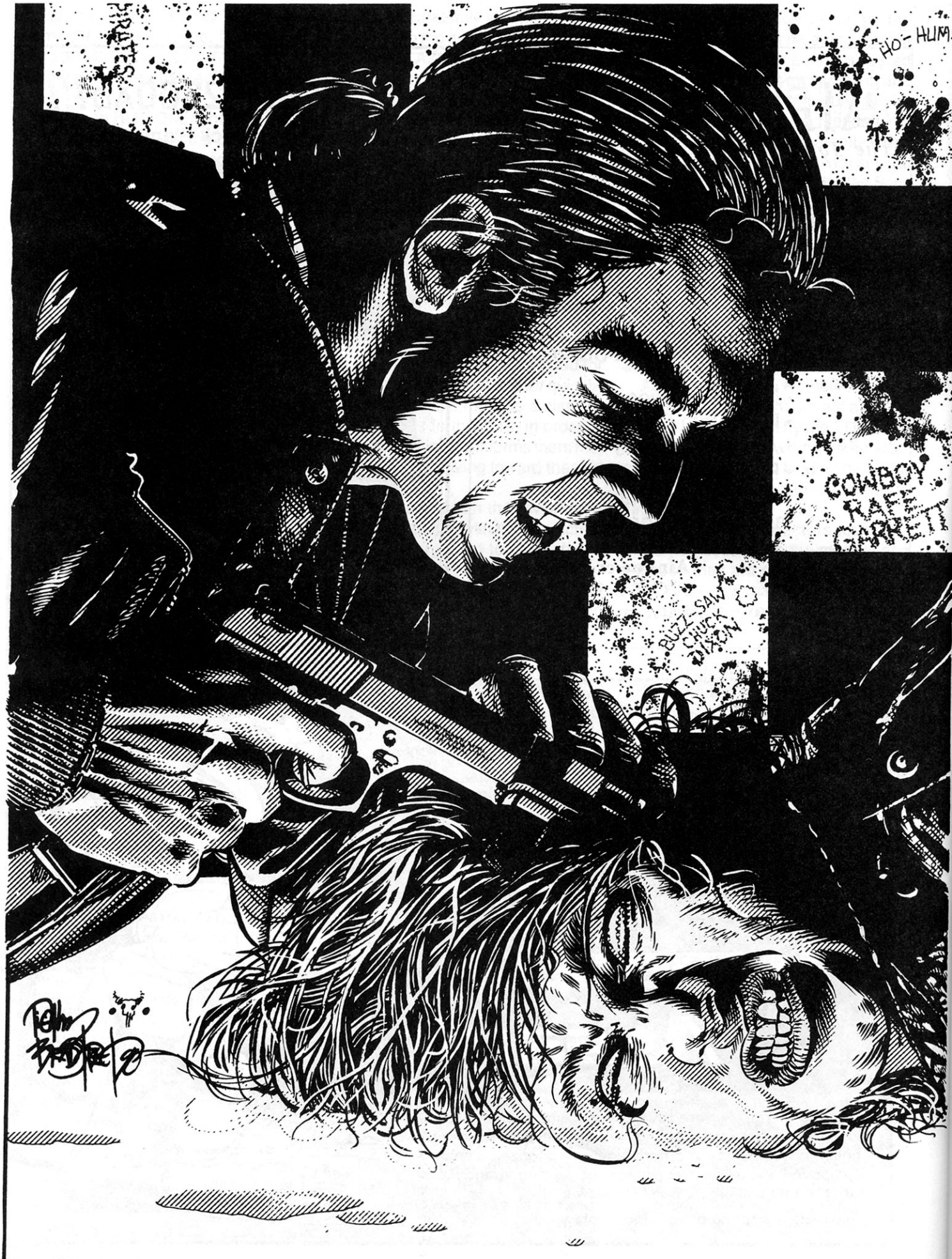
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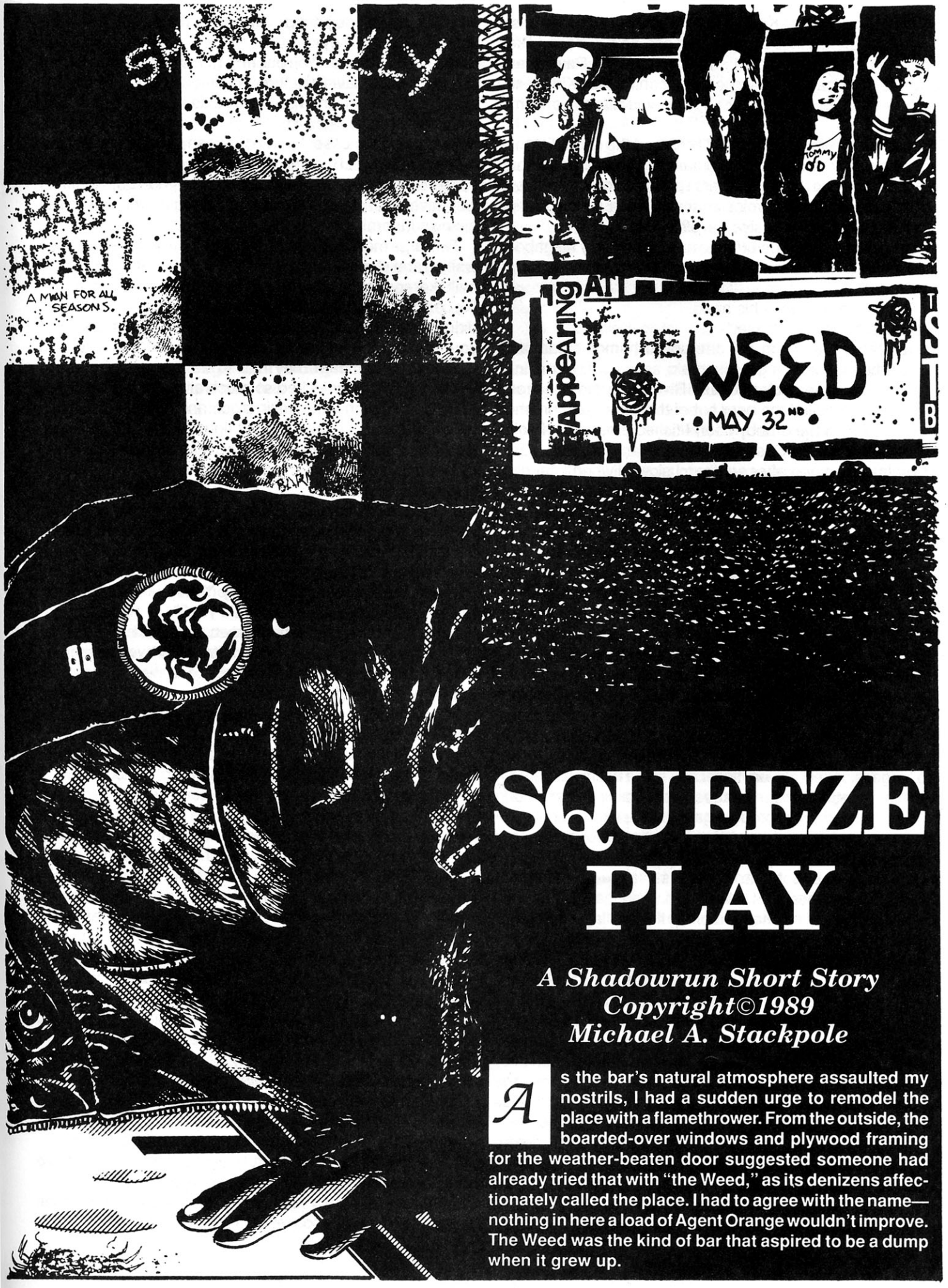


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SQUEEZE PLAY

A Shadowrun Short Story
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As the bar's natural atmosphere assaulted my nostrils, I had a sudden urge to remodel the place with a flamethrower. From the outside, the boarded-over windows and plywood framing for the weather-beaten door suggested someone had already tried that with "the Weed," as its denizens affectionately called the place. I had to agree with the name—nothing in here a load of Agent Orange wouldn't improve. The Weed was the kind of bar that aspired to be a dump when it grew up.

I'd not liked Ronnie Killstar when I'd spoken with him to set up this meeting. After seeing the place he'd chosen I liked him even less. Easy, Wolf, I reminded myself—Raven gave you this job because you've got more control than Kid Stealth or Tom Electric. Don't let him down—you already owe him too much.

Against my better judgement I crossed the short distance from the door to the bar. A small Mexican-looking man wandered over to the place where I elbowed my way between two other patrons. His voice sounded like a ripsaw tearing into sheet steel. "Waddalya have?"

I squinted against the burning smoke from my neighbor's Saskatchewan Corona Grande and shrugged. "What's on tap?"

The bartender shook his head.

"Great, make it a double."

He stared blankly at my attempt at humor. "Waddalya have?" he rasped in a gravel-croak.

I glanced at the cooler. "Green River Pale. No need for a glass." As he pulled the beer out of the cooler and brushed the ice off onto the grubby floor, I fished a handful of coins from my pocket. He twisted the cap off, and I started plunking coins down one after another. I slowed when I got near what the beer had to cost, then stopped when his hand started to move forward. He glanced up at me, shrugged, then gave me the drink.

I carried the bottle toward the corner furthest from the door. The beer tasted like his voice sounded, but cold, and I set it down quickly. Nestling myself into the booth, I unzipped my black leather jacket and settled in to watch the door, the bar, and its patrons. I kept the beer in my left hand while letting my right rest near the butt of my Beretta Viper 14.

My new vantage point allowed me a fuller appreciation of the Weed's decor. The plastic babydoll heads and high-heeled shoes hanging from the ceiling somehow made sense within the larger context. Most of the light came from sputtering neon signs begging patrons to drink exotic brews the bar no longer stocked. Silvery tinsel and some flashing lights left behind during a Christmas ages ago mocked the moribund setting, but somehow brought gaiety to the expression of the plastic department store dummy floating above a busted pinball machine. The place oozed atmosphere.

I used my beer bottle to smear a six-legged piece of that atmosphere across the table.

About the only normal portion of the bar lay kitty-corner across the room from my position. Three 'trix-jack tables, the cocktail model, lay up against the wall. I should have taken it as significant that only one wirehead was using the Weed's facilities. She hugged a Seattle Seadog's baseball jacket around her and looked cute, so I winked at her. A 'trode halo circled her ebony brow, and the light from the unit's display washed in rainbow waves over her face, but she didn't notice it or me. Whatever graphics were flashing across the screen were for outsider consumption only—that decker was jacked in deep and was playing her own little games.

I smelled dead flowers about a second and a half before I heard the click of Ronnie Killstar's wrist spur. Large as life, or at least as large as he could muster, the pasty-faced street samurai slid into the booth across from me. The jaundiced light from the bar skittered across the razored edge of the curved metal blade jutting out from his right wrist, and a red light glowed in his eyes.

He sneered at me. "You ought to get your eyes done. I can bullseye a rat's navel at a thousand meters in the pitch dark. I saw you come in, and I saw you sit down. I can see in here plain as day."

That being the case, I saw no reason to mention he'd just wiped the sleeve of his white jacket through cockroach paste. I sniffed at the air. "I don't need eyes to find you, Ronnie. I just have to let my nose lead me to the guy who smells like his own funeral."

Two large men slipped from in back where Ronnie had been waiting and stood on either side of our booth. They were both built like those smiling Buddha-type statues you can find down the coast in San Shanghai, 'cept these two wore more clothes, didn't smile, and didn't look like they'd give you good luck if you rubbed their bellies. Still, if they were hanging around with Ronnie it meant they had to be losers—which also explained why they looked so much at home in the Weed.

His intimidation batteries in place and ready to fire, Ronnie reinforced his sneer. "I didn't figure the great Dr. Raven would trust Wolfgang Kies with an assignment of this importance."

I smiled. "™."

"Huh?"

I smiled more broadly. "I said, '™.' You forgot to add the trademark onto the phrase 'the Great Dr. Raven.'" I shook my head ruefully. "That's why he sent me. You've got no manners and no sense of propriety. You wouldn't expect him to come to a place like this, would you?"

Clearly any space in Ronnie's monosynaptic brain devoted to humor was overloaded by my effort. His eyes flashed on and off as he got angry and his concentration broke. Suddenly, with a metallic snap that sounded like a pistol being cocked, a 10-inch icepick blade shot out from between the middle and ring fingers on his right hand, and he lunged forward. The tip touched my throat right above the silver wolf's head totem I wear and drew a single drop of blood.

"I don't need your static, you lickboot! Raven sent word that he wanted to make a deal with La Plante, not the other way around. We're not doing you a favor—it's you that wants one from us." Killstar's dark eyes narrowed. "I want Raven!"

With great effort I killed the urge to lunge forward and bite his face off. I swallowed hard and felt the icepick brush against my Adam's apple. "I wanted La Plante. I would suggest we're even."

I forced my eyes wide open and got the surprise reaction I expected as Ronnie looked into them for the first time. With the anger rising in me I knew they had gone from green to silver—that change is not all that rare. Ronnie got an added treat, though, as a dark circle surrounded the iris with a Killer's Ring. *Your augmented eyes may let you see in the dark, but they can't do that. It's something you have to have inside—it's not an option you get to tack-on aftermarket.*

Ronnie leaned back but left the stinger extended. "Maybe we are even. What are you offering Mr. La Plante?"

I ignored the question as a droplet of sweat burned into the pinprick at my throat. "I want proof she's still alive."

The punk snapped his fingers, and one of the Buddha brothers produced a pocket TV and slipped a small CD ROM

into the unit. I took it from him and hit the play button. The LCD screen flickered to life, and I saw Moira Alianha standing calmly before a wallscreen television. She moved back and forth in front of it, and I concentrated on how her long, black hair trailed out and through the image. If they had recorded her moving before a blank screen and then masked in a recent program to make me think she was still alive, the process would have broken down on those fine details.

It looked clean to me—the news was current as of an hour ago—but I didn't want to give Ronnie the satisfaction of knowing I felt he'd done something right. "A SenseTape would have been better."

It was an effort for him to roll his mechanical eyes to heaven. "And we could have brought her here with a brass band and an army of grunges, but we don't think we're going to recover our overhead on this one. Satisfied?"

I pocketed the device. "She's alive."

Ronnie smiled like a gambler holding four of a kind. "Mister La Plante has a client who has offered us a great deal of money for Moira Alianha. What can Raven offer us to outbid our other client?"

I tried to suppress the wince, but the additional constriction on either side of Ronnie's smile showed me I'd failed. Dr. Raven lost no love on Etienne La Plante, but recovering Moira and returning her to the Elven Lands south of the Seattle Sprawl meant he had to subordinate his own feelings and deal with the man. As Ronnie's smile cooled into a smug look of superiority, I decided Kid Stealth might have been right in the first place—bring the whole crew in and take La Plante's empire apart.

"It won't ensure we save the girl," Doc had told him.

"Yeah," the Kid had acknowledged, "But it'll feel gigabytes better than I would helping that slime."

I rested my elbows on the table and steepled my fingers. "I have been authorized to offer you the Fujiwara shipping schedule for the next six months in return for the girl. We can make the exchange tonight."

For all of 10 seconds Ronnie got that divine-revelation look on his face. Suddenly he realized how big a game he was involved in and how small a player in it he was. Then his eyes hooded over as the little maggot figured out how important Moira Alianha had to be for the doctor to offer that kind of information for her. A thought shot off on the wrong branch of his neural network, and he began to believe in his own importance.

He scoffed at the offer and eased himself out of the booth. "Maybe. I'll talk to La Plante and let you know. You can wait here until then."

My right leg swept out and hooked up between his legs. I drew my knee up, jerking him against the edge of the table. That knocked the wind out of him and caused him to jackknife forward. I grabbed a handful of his stringy, blond hair with my left hand and tucked the barrel of my Viper in his left ear.

A Killer Ring stare kept the karma twins at bay.

"That was a wrong answer, Ronnie." I eased the hammer back on the automatic even though that was unnecessary on the double-action pistol. "Mr. La Plante, I know you'd not be who you are if you let an idiot like this conduct your negotiations for you without keeping tabs on him. I'd guess you've bugged Ying and Yang here, unless you tricked this dolt into carrying a set of ears on himself."



A glint of gold from the cloisonné orchid pin on Ronnie's lapel gave him away. "Very good, Mr. La Plante. Your gang's trademark pin is a listening device. I salute your technomancers. I suggest your Chauffeur pull the limo around so we can discuss things in private, say, in five minutes. We'll take a spin around the block, and then you'll drop me back here. If not, I'm going to decorate the Weed's ceiling with something that'll add some real color."

The Coors clock on the wall ticked off four and a half minutes before the door opened. The Chauffeur, dressed in a spiffy uniform with creases sharp enough to cut like razors, nodded to me. I patted Ronnie patronizingly on the head. "We'll have to do this again when I have more time to play."

Whatever Ronnie replied, it wasn't very polite, and I put it down to his discomfort as I put my weight on his head while I stood. The twin pillars of eastern wisdom moved out of my way, and I made it to the doorway unmolested. Aside from the wirehead on the rent-a-deck, no one in the place noticed my passing.

I handed the Viper to the Chauffeur and stepped into the street. The white Avanti stretch limo looked as out of place on the litter-strewn street as a wharf rat in the mayor's office, but that didn't stop it from being there. I waited as the Chauffeur scanned me with whatever he had for eyes behind those mirrored glasses of his, then he smiled and entered the limo's dark interior.

Having grown up in the concrete alleys of Seattle, I thought of class as something you escaped from during the day. Despite my absolute loathing of anything and everything Etienne La Plante did and was, I still had to admit he had class. His double-breasted suit had been cut from cloth of silver, yet—if possible—it did not look ostentatious or flashy. His wavy white hair had been perfectly cut and combed, giving me the impression that I'd stepped into a boardroom for a long-planned meeting.

I settled into a velvet seat so comfortable I could have died happy in it, especially if the woman seated next to La Plante gave me another one of her sensual smiles. In the armrest at my left hand sat a frosted mug of beer—the half-empty bottle next to it proclaimed it to be Henry Weinhard's Private Reserve.

Very good, Etienne, my favorite. Is it true that you bought the brewery because you heard one of Raven's men loved the stuff?

La Plante refrained from offering me his right hand, but I didn't mind. If there was any flesh and blood left to it, the silver carapace hid it completely. I noticed, as he picked up his own mug of beer, that the hand articulated perfectly, but then he could afford perfection. I'd not heard of any assassination attempts against him, so I had to assume he had voluntarily maimed himself.

"I would apologize, Mr. Kies, for my underling's actions, but, you understand, that was a test." He shrugged wearily.

"After the bad blood between Dr. Raven and myself, you can forgive my being suspicious."

I nodded. "You can call me Wolf." I directed the comment more to the woman than La Plante and waited a half second for a similar offer of intimacy from the crime boss. I continued when he ignored me. "When Dr. Raven was informed you had become the custodian for Ms. Alianha and was called upon by her Elven guardians to get her back, he was forced to make some choices. I am sure you can understand that negotiation was not the most popular course of action suggested."

The crimelord nodded sagely. "Former employees can be so, ah, vindictive, can't they?"

Sure, especially when you try to plant them in the harbor with their feet bound in a block of cement. No one would have figured Kid Stealth would blow off his own legs to escape that little deathtrap, but he did and survived. *When your time comes, the timekeeper will be wearing shiny new legs and will move faster than even you remember.*

"You heard our offer. You get the Fujiwara shipment schedules for the next six months in return for the girl. We'll burn the data into an eprom for you. We can do the exchange tonight."

La Plante maintained a nonchalant expression on his face. "You have a decker good enough to get into Fujiwara that quickly? We're talking multiple layers of ice with interactive defensive systems and the possibility of artificial intelligence directing counterpenetration efforts."

I smiled confidently. "The only way to stop this decker is with genuine intelligence and a .45 automatic. We'll get the schedule for you."

He hid his excitement at the offer well. "How do I know the data will be good?"

I sat up straight. "You have Dr. Raven's word on it."

Whereas Ronnie Killstar would have answered with some inane barb, La Plante just nodded. "Very well." He leaned over and whispered something in the redhead's ear. As she reached over and picked up my mug, he commented. "You've not tried your beer. I assure you, it has not been tampered with."

She sipped and returned the mug to its place on the armrest. As she licked her lips I felt my heart rate climb and counted to 10—no, 15—to regain control. "Sorry," I smiled, "but after the Weed, drinking in here just wouldn't be the same. You understand." For her benefit, I added, "Maybe another time."

The door opened again. La Plante's Chauffeur hovered by the door with my gun in hand. "Tonight, Mr. Kies, at warehouse building 18B on the docks. We will give you the southern and western approaches. I would prefer this to be an intimate gathering."

"My feelings exactly. You bring a dozen of your grunges, and I'll consider it even." I succeeded in getting myself perched on the edge of the seat. "And leave Ronnie at home."

La Plante waved my last remark off with a silvery flourish of his right hand. "Do not concern yourself with him. He has been assigned new duties. He'll be feeding fish for the foreseeable future."

The Chauffeur handed me the pistol, then swung the door shut. I smiled at him and his plastic mask of servitude cracked. "Someday, Wolf, it will come down to you and me. I'll make it quick. I want you to know that."

I met his mirror-eyed stare with my number two nasty glare. "Good. I like that. If the fights go too long, the bloodstains set, and then you can't ever get them out."

His plastic mask back in place, he turned and walked away. In spite of the nausea building in my stomach, I reentered the Weed. My beer still waited on the table, but Ronnie and the wonton boys had vanished. I waited and sniffed, but I couldn't smell flowers.

Instead of returning to my booth, I walked over to the jacktables. I pulled the bug from inside my jacket and tossed it on the black woman's deck. "Did you get it all?"

Valerie Valkyrie, Raven's newest aide, gave me a smile that made me forget La Plante's tastetester. "Everything, including your pulse rate and blood pressure when she sucked on your beer."

I felt the burn of a blush sweeping across my face, and it grew hotter as it pulled a giggle from her throat. "Cute, Val. We'll discuss how much of that makes it into the report for the doctor later. Right now we've got work to do."

II

"All right, Zig and Zag, let's go through the drill one more time."

Zag frowned, and the razor claws on the black man's left hand flicked out, then retracted with the speed of a snake's tongue. "We've got names."

I raised myself up to my full height, which still left me an inch or two shorter than either one of them. "And right now they're Zig and Zag. You're local talent, and I'm your Mr. Johnson. Now you claim you want to join this elite circle my Mr. Johnson has put together? Fine—this is a tryout. Try living with new names for a second or two, got it?"

Zig elbowed Zag, and they both nodded. For street samurai they weren't bad. Zag had gone the obvious route of adding chrome in the form of razor claws grafted to his hands and some wiring adjustments to his reflexes. He'd replaced his eyes with a laser-targeting unit linked to the scope on his Kalashnikov. He'd gone a bit far, in my mind, by having his eyes look like amber tiger eyes with slit pupils, but it was all part of the macho that made him a street samurai. Might look silly to me, but I don't think I'd like seeing them glow in a dark alley.

Zig had been more discreet. He'd gone in for body work. Just from the way he walked I knew he'd had his reflexes cranked up so he moved with the speed of something between a Bengal tiger and a striking cobra. I didn't see any body blades, but he was a bit more subtle than his partner, so he might not have flashed them. I also got the impression he'd had some subdermal armor plates inserted to protect his vital organs—a wise choice. One never knows where those replacement organs were grown. The failure percentage on cut-rate Khmer hearts made having a bandaid slapped on the old one look like a good bet for survival.

"Val and I are going to jack into the Matrix. No one ought to be able to track us down to this place, but we can't be 100-percent certain of that. I need you two to be alert and careful because when we bust the system we're going after, things

could get messy. What do you do if there's trouble?"

Zag grumbled and walked over to where my MP-9 rested on the bed. "We slap the trodes off you and hand you this toy. Then we get the wirehead out of here."

Val didn't notice the rancor in Zag's voice at his having been shot down earlier. When he had asked if she would be interested in a little camaraderie to "relieve the tension" she'd looked at him as if he was a Matrix deck with "Made in America" stamped on its side. Zig and I shared a smile as Zag's anger deepened when Val continued to ignore him.

"Good. That's it. You get her out and get her to the place she tells you. Don't worry about me—I'll be fine."

"Or dead." Zag hefted one of the spare clips for my submachinegun. "Freaking 9mm toy, and you've got silver bullets!? Who do you think you are, the Lone Ranger?" He thumbed one bullet from the clip and tossed it to Zig.

Easy, Wolf, better this tough guy act to hide his nerves than him falling apart on you. "I think I'm your Mr. Johnson—and a superstitious one at that."

Zig looked closely at the silver bullet in his hand. "Drilled and patched—ho, laddie, these are special. You got mercury in there to make the bullet explode?"

I shook my head solemnly. "Silver nitrate solution. Physics is the same—the result is nastier. Burns as it goes."

Zig tossed the bullet back to his partner. "Be you planning on hunting a werewolf or something, boyo?"

"Were you in Seattle during the Full Moon Slashings?"

The mention of that series of killings tore Val away from her deck. "A half-dozen years ago? That was the first anyone had heard of Dr. Raven, isn't it?"

"Yeah." I let that one word answer hang there long enough for all three of them to realize I wasn't going to say anything specific about that outing. "After that I've carried silver bullets. Never want to be without them if you need them."

Val shivered. "Viper too?"

"Amen." I forced myself to smile and break the mood. "You got that Hibatchi unit prepped yet?"

Val scolded me. "Hitachi, Wolf, and you know it. This baby has been worked over a couple of times, with all the major league mods."

I accepted a 'trode coronet from her slender fingers and pulled it onto my head. I adjusted it so the electrodes pressed against my temples and ran back over the midline of my skull. Val reached over and tightened the band to improve the contact, then she clipped the dangling lead into a splice cable. She slid that jack into the slot behind her left ear, then flipped a switch on the deck.

I winked at her. "Let's do it."

She winked back and hit a button on the keyboard. "Play ball."

Doc Raven had warned me that Valerie Valkyrie was special, but until we plunged through that electric aurora wall of static and into the Matrix, I had no idea how special. I'd jacked into the Matrix before—who hasn't—but it had always been at a public deck where I ended up inside an entertainment system. Moving from game program to game program I caught glimpses of cyberspace through the neat little windows the programmers had built into their systems, but I'd not had any desire to go out adventuring on my own.

Normally the form and shape of the Matrix is decided by LANCON—the local area network controllers. Here in Seattle the Matrix resembled a vector graphic of the urban sprawl it encompassed. Well fortified databases were surrounded by fences and walls, and Matrix security teams patrolled the electronic streets like cops cruising a beat. I'd heard it had been designed that way because it made the casual user feel as if he was in familiar surroundings and it made it easier for him to find his way around.



In San Shanghai, my pet name for San Francisco, I understood the Matrix had originally had a similar geographical layout. Cablecars carried data transfers from one place to another in a landscape dominated by the Kyoto-Prudential tower. A Golden Gate bridge even carried users to the other local networks, and rumor had it that the army had a supersecret datastack corresponding to the Presidio nestled at its base.

As things got strange and the world shifted, so did the Matrix in San Francisco. When a user entered the Chinatown area, the buildings melted away, and the databases represented themselves with Mah Jong tiles. Hackers claimed that made it easier to pick out weak bases, but I don't know about that. I have heard it said, and can believe, that no one goes near the bases represented by dragons.

But that's the way of the world. Steer as clear of dragons as possible—words to live by and advice it'll kill you to ignore.

I once heard a hacker story that said if a decker got good enough junk he could impose his own sense of order on the Matrix. With enough skill and equipment he could make the Matrix appear the way he wanted it—free of extraneous data. Another urban legend born in the Matrix.

Valerie Valkyrie was a legendary decker.

After only two seconds in cyberspace, the landscape construct shifted. Gone were the clean lines of glowing lime-green streets and shining white buildings. Suddenly I found myself standing beside the pitcher's mound in a monstrous baseball stadium. Val, outlined in a neon-blue that matched her eyes, gave me a broad grin and pulled on a baseball cap that materialized from thin air. The cap had a Raven patch on it.

"Sorry if you aren't used to this, Wolf." The shrug of her shoulders told me that she wasn't sorry at all and that my surprised reaction made her day. "Warping the Matrix to my conception of it gives me a home field advantage."

Within the solar yellow of the glove on her right hand I saw her fingers move as they flew across the keyboard back in the real world. From a dugout over on the third base side of the field, a smallish man walked up toward the plate. Behind and above him a scoreboard flashed to life and spewed out all sorts of information in hexidecimal.

I pointed up at the display. "Can you translate?"

She looked at me as if I'd disappointed her, then nodded. Suddenly the scoreboard flickered, and the handy notation of baseball replaced the curious array of numbers and letters. Coming up to bat was Ronnie Killstar's personal file.

The count was no balls and two strikes, and the scoreboard reported his batting average as .128. He batted right handed.

Val licked her lips as a catcher and umpire materialized behind the plate. "Can of corn." A green ball appeared in her left hand, and she spun it around until she grasped it between her thumb, index, and middle fingers. Rearing back, her azure outline blurred, and she delivered the pitch. It arced in at the plate, then dropped a full six inches below Ronnie's futile swing.

"Yer out!" screamed the umpire.

All sorts of data poured out onto the scoreboard. It was a bit more nasty than one might expect to find on the average baseball card, but it still bespoke nothing more than a mediocre career.

A quick comparison of his successful stolen bases versus times caught out in the attempt confirmed he was an unsuccessful small-time thief before La Plante took him on as a legbreaker.

As the record of his most recent phone calls started to flash up on the scoreboard, I looked over at Val. "You can cut this any time you want. He's useless, and now he's dead." I glanced over at the number of the last call he made. "Hope it was to his mother."

Val wrinkled her nose. "I was unaware anyone had taught Petri dishes to answer the phone." She caught the ball the catcher threw back at her. "That was just a warm-up. I shouldn't have used a forkball on him—that was overkill."

Certain things started to click into place for me. Cracking systems required a vast array of ice-breaking programs. Most deckers use commercially developed software and, consequently, can only break into the most simple of bases.

True artists like Val modify and write their own warez. I talked with a decker who ran under the handle of Merlin who had named all of his ice-breakers after spells. "It helps me remember what is what. When some system is trying to flatline you, you want to be able to react quickly with a codebomb that will do the job." Val, with her passion for baseball, had designed and named her ice-breakers for pitches.

"Let's get on to the main show, okay?"

"Roger."

Val concentrated, and her fingers moved. I noticed some subtle changes in the stadium as the Fujiwara database came into range for us to access it. "Okay, we're ready to begin. Kind of like robbing Peter to pay Paul, isn't it?"

I nodded. Fujiwara Corporation was a legal shell that laundered money for a Yakuza group based further down the coast. Whereas La Plante was a broker who facilitated the movement of things from one party to another, Fujiwara actually brought contraband materials into Seattle from all over the world. On a scale of one to Hitler's SS, both groups ranked fairly high, but Fujiwara exercised a bit more restraint in how they dealt with rivals.

That means they prefer a single yak hitter to a mad bomber. La Plante did as well until Kid Stealth had the temerity to defect to Raven. Neither group played nicely with their enemies, and this little Matrix run was about to deposit us on Fujiwara's bad side.

The butterflies started in my stomach as a behemoth stepped from the dugout. He looked like something from a cartoon. He had tiny legs and a narrow waist that blossomed up into immensely powerful arms and shoulders. The bat he carried looked like it had been cold-hammered into shape from the hull of an aircraft carrier, but he wielded it as if it weighed no more than a spoon.

The field changed abruptly when he stepped into the batter's box to hit right handed. Runners appeared on second and third, and the count stood even at 0 and 0. The batter's name appeared on the scoreboard as Babe Fujiwara, and his batting average stood at a whopping .565.

I swallowed hard. "Why do I get the feeling this man is the All Star team all rolled into one?"

Val wiped her brow on her sleeve. "That's because he is." Then she shot me a winning grin. "But that's okay, baby, because I'm Rookie of the Year."

"Play ball!" cried the umpire.

Val's fingers flashed over the ball and within her mitt as she reared back to throw. The fastball sizzled yellow and gold as it streaked toward the plate. Babe Fujiwara swung on the pitch and missed, but not by much. From the look on Val's face she had expected a larger margin of victory than the one she'd been given.

Her cerulean eyes narrowed. I saw her grip the now-green ball in the same way she had done to deal with Ronnie. The forkball shot from her hand at medium speed, then dropped precipitously. Even so, his bat whipped around, and he hit the ice-breaker solidly. Suddenly it shifted color from green to red and rocketed back on to the field.

It hit me in the left ankle, and fiery pain shot up my leg. The ball popped into the air as I dropped to the ground. Val sprang off the mound, gathered the ball up and tossed it over at Babe as he lumbered up the baseline toward first. When the ball hit him in the shoulder he exploded into blue sparks.

Gasping against the pain, I looked up at her. "What the hell was that?"

Val's nostrils flared. "Fujiwara has put some reactive warez on line. I managed to flip a couple of bits in that program and used it to destroy the ice layer that spawned it, but I'm not sure I can do that again."

I got an uneasy feeling in the pit of my stomach. "We're in a bit deeper than we want to be, aren't we?"

She looked over at the runners on second and third. "We got a pass on the first two layers of ice. We would have wasted time and broken them, but I thought speed was of the essence. Fujiwara gave them to us to make it difficult for us to get out of here."

I raised an eyebrow as I massaged my ankle. "You mean we're trapped in the Fujiwara database."

She shrugged. "It's a matter of perspective."

"Well, try it from my perspective—one of pain."

"We're trapped." She saw me begin the fingerwork for the spell that would deaden the pain. "Don't waste the effort, Wolf. That stuff doesn't work in this environment." Her fingers convulsed, and a blue mitt appeared on my left hand. "Just use this to block anything they hit at you, and it should protect you."

I looked at the mitt and pounded my right hand into its pocket. "If I do get something I can't just put the runners out?"

She nodded. "Don't tag them. It'll destroy the ice layer, but you don't want to be that close when it goes."

"What happens if they score?"

Val's smile died. "Don't ask. This is the big leagues."

"Got it."

The next layer of ice materialized as a somewhat smaller batter dubbed Mookie Fujiwara. He took position to bat left handed, and I saw that did not please Val at all. The ball in her hand took on a bright orange color. She wound up and threw. The whirling screwball arced in and broke toward Mookie, jamming him on the fists. He fouled it off.

Up on the scoreboard his batting average went from.500 to .375, and I took heart in that. It cheered Val up as well. She prepared another program, and the ball coalesced into an opalescent sphere. Her knuckles rested on the seams, then she started her motion and threw.

The program flew slowly toward the plate. It spun not at all, but floated and dipped erratically. It dove toward the ground as it neared the plate, and Mookie missed it with a clean cut. Another strike toted itself up on the board, and his average fell to .175.

Val shot me a wink. "The knuckler always works on these midrange reactors. It never shows them enough for them to create a countercode quickly."

I smiled reassuringly. "Gonna use it again?"

"Nope." She studied the scoreboard and shook her head. "Do it again and I give it a chance to react. Got something else for this ice layer."

A white ball formed in her hand. Val grinned cruelly and delivered the ball with a half-sidearm motion. It jetted in, then broke at the last second. Mookie swung and missed, and the umpire called him out. He vanished, and I heard a couple of voices cheering.

Turning around, I saw two figures in the grandstands. One looked like a glass spider, and the other wore the form of a black cat. "What the hell?"

Val waved at them. "Just some other deckers come to watch the fun. The Glass Tarantula and Alley Cat are two locals I've met before."

That weird feeling ran up my spine again. "This was supposed to be a covert run, you know. What if Fuji learns we're here?"

Valerie fixed me with a stare that made me want to hit the showers. "Wolf, the reactors in their ice means they already know we're here. We've had an audience in the owner's box ever since we started. Looks like the yaks at Fujiwara have a line into La Plante's operation."

I filed that information away for future use as the final batter stepped out of the dugout. Whereas Babe had looked like a cartoon, this layer of ice manifested itself as a long, lean player with incredibly thick forearms and wrists. His flesh had a grayish, metallic tint to it, and his head metamorphed into that of a horse. His name appeared on the scoreboard as Iron Horse Fujiwara, and his batting average registered as .957. He batted left and the glint in his eye was nothing short of pure evil.

Val's skin took on an ashen hue. "Dammit, I didn't think it would be this tough. I'm going to have to doctor some stuff here." A white ball appeared in her mitt, but as her fingers worked on it, bloody tendrils shot through it.

Satisfied, but not looking as confident as I would have liked, she watched the batter, then let the ball fly. It cruised in at a medium speed, then broke sharply as if it had fallen off a table. I looked for hesitation in the batter's eye, but I saw none and braced for disaster.



Then the Iron Horse's bat whipped around in a buzz-saw arc and smashed the ball back at the mound. Halfway there the ball burst into flame, but the line drive didn't slow at all. Val raised her glove defensively and managed to get it into place to stop the ball from hitting her in the face. Her glove burst into flame, and she spun to the ground, but the ball hung there for a second, defying gravity.

I lunged at the ball. My glove boiled off, and I felt as if I'd reached into a barbecue to barehand a glowing coal. "Help here, Val!"

How she did what she did I don't know, but the flamed died, and the ball took on a blue tint. I flipped it over to my right hand and saw the runner on third make a break for home. I drew the ball back to my right ear and threw it as hard as I could.

The blue ball shot through the base-runner like a searchlight through fog. It flew on beyond him and into the dugout. A volcano of sparks shot out from there, and the baseball stadium began to crumble. In an eyeblink we were back in the city map Matrix for Seattle, and the third floor of the Fujiwara tower exploded.

Then that imaging system failed me as well. I found myself floating in a sea of data. Waves of telephone numbers crested up over me and drove me down toward spreadsheets and cost overrun statements. Just as I felt as though I were drowning in a vast inventory system, a hand grabbed me on the shoulder, and the safehouse room with Zig and Zag swam back into view.

Val watched me closely, and I knew Zag would have died to have her looking at him with such concern in her eyes. "Are you okay?"

I thought about the question for a second, then nodded. "Yeah, I think so. What happened?"

The Valkyrie's eyes narrowed. "I can't be certain, but I think the person who programmed Fujiwara's ICE system built himself a back door. That blue ball was a simple virus meant to pump spurious data into the system so quickly that things would freeze up, giving me a chance to react with another program. You tossed it through one of the layers we bypassed and right through the back door into their system. That stopped the Iron Horse on his trip to first, and I used an ALS virus to dust him."

"Did we get the information we needed?"

On cue the Hitachi deck's eprom platform slid out from within the black case, offering the computer chip into which the Fujiwara information had been burned. "Looks like it." Her smile lessened a bit as she looked at me again. "What else?"

I frowned. "Something's digging around at the back of my brain." I shrugged it off. "I guess I just want to be in an arena where I can shoot anybody who looks like the Iron Horse. It's the warrior in me."

"Pity," she laughed. "You've got a future as a decker."

III

"What's he doing?" Zag asked as I started preparing myself for battle. Val frowned at him and remained quiet as I closed my eyes and reached inside. I pressed my hands together and touched the wolf's head amulet at my throat. Using it as a focus, I let my mind touch the Wolf Spirit dwelling in my heart and mind.

I saw it as a huge beast built mostly out of shadows except where lurid red highlights rippled across its fur. Lean and hungry, it still contained incredible power. When it felt my caress, enthusiastic fires burned in its eyes, but they dulled to a bloody color when it sensed my hesitation.

"Is the time come, my son?" it asked in snarls and growls.

"Yes, Old One. I need your speed and your sureness of movement."

It regarded me with the same disdain Val had shown in cyberspace. "Let me deal with everything, Longtooth. You need not these machine men or the witch of the thinking machine. You will not need your guns. My way is pure. You know I am correct. Why do you resist me so?"

I deflected us away from that discussion because I knew the dark and dangerous path it would cause me to tread. "I need what I need."

The old wolf lay down to mock me. "I grant you what you need. It will not be long now that you and I will have this conversation again."

I shook my head. "Seven days. I'll be clear of Seattle by then."

The wolf howled, and that sound echoed through my head as I opened my eyes. I heard the hissed sizzle of the spells trail off, and found Zag staring at me with renewed respect and a bit of apprehension in his eyes. I could smell his nervous sweat even over and above the tangy sea scent and musty mildew odor hanging over the dock area. I smiled and nodded—*all set now. Let's hope La Plante hasn't gotten stupid.*

Zag swallowed hard. "Look, Mr. Kies, I'm sorry about any static I gave you before. With your rep and all, I figured you were like us." He held his right hand up, and the razor claws flicked out at the ends of his fingers. "I didn't realize you weren't chromed."

I read the confusion in his eyes like a banner headline on a news service monitor. I was known to be quick and nasty in a firefight. I was the aide who'd survived the most adventures with Dr. Raven—and that was no mean feat. To Gillettes like Zig and Zag that meant I'd been filled with a bunch of cybernetic improvements. The idea that I might be a natural who used magic to augment his skills hadn't occurred to them. And, because they had chosen a route that virtually barred them from using magic, the sorcerous arts baffled and scared them.

Zig handed me a small stick of black grease paint. He'd hidden his eyes within a pair of downward pointing triangles and had drawn an upward pointing triangle over his nose. "Symbol of the Halloweeners over in the Green River District," he quipped.

"I know." I put the facepaint stick down on a crate. "I don't paint up."

That seemed to surprise them almost as much as my having used magic. Most folks who worked magic, especially of the shamanistic variety I used, were spoken of as having gone native. After the Ghost Dances had worked and killed lots of folks, many people travelled out to the reservations and swelled the population of the Amerindian nations. Some later left because the lifestyle didn't suit them, but those who stayed contributed to the polyglot makeup of the tribes. Consequently it wasn't completely strange to find a white man who knew Indian magic, but it was weird to find one who didn't go the whole way and paint up before battle.

I broke the tension. "I don't paint up for something I hope won't be a battle. I'll be out there getting the girl, so I'll be naked anyway." I pointed to the Kalashnikovs they carried. "They look like old friends."

Zig patted his automatic rifle affectionately. "Sighted at 400 meters for close-in work, lad. Stood me in good stead during the Triad invasion out on the Strip."

"Good." I gave both of them one of my I-have-confidence-in-you smiles. "The drill's the same as earlier today. You get Val and Moira out. La Plante uses grunges for muscle. If things get nasty, pop one or two of them, then see-saw your way out of there. If you burn a clip, I expect all the shots to hit an Ork, or you best be shooting at me. Hit and move—a war of attrition we can't win."

Both of them gave me a thumbs-up, so I turned to Val. "Sure you don't want a gun?"

She shook her head with disgust. "You've got me bundled up in Kevlar so tight I can barely breathe. The last thing I want to do is make myself a target so they'll have cause to shoot me."

I chuckled lightly. "Okay. Moira is your charge. Things get nasty, you get her out of there. Zig and Zag will keep the beasts at bay."

Val nodded. "You have the chip?"

I patted the pocket of my jacket. "Check." I hefted my MP-9 and let it dangle by the strap over my right shoulder. "Let's do this clean and all go home healthy. Places, everyone." I filled my lungs with air and calmed my racing heart. "It's show time."

I stepped from the warehouse into a dock area that had been cleared of anything approximating cover. Lit by bright halogen lights that held the night's darkness at bay, the open arena was defined on two sides by crates and loading machinery, and on my side by the warehouse I'd just left. The fourth wall, the one I faced as I slipped between some crates, had been formed by another warehouse. The large doors stood open, and La Plante's limo had been parked in it, so the hood and tail of the vehicle almost appeared to be holding the doors back.

A dozen grunges sporting various styles of submachine-guns stood dutifully behind the limo and pointed their weapons in my direction. I held my hands away from my body and kept them open, but I knew my magically enhanced reflexes would allow me to shoulder the gun and snap off a half-dozen rounds before they even saw me move. In three seconds I could clear the clip and draw the Viper from my waistband to finish the job.

Back off, Wolfgang. It's the Old One's meddling that's making you think that way.

The Chauffeur appeared in the middle of the line of grunges.

"Drop the gun, Kies."

I barked out a sharp laugh. "Dream on. You've got me covered a dozen ways to Sunday."

The grunges—others call them Orks—began to hoot and twitter like the half-witted beasts most of them are. Ugly as sin and more stupid than even Ronnie, they make up the majority of the muscle for most criminal organizations. I understand that until puberty, when they undergo "goblinization," the ones that aren't purebred look and act like normal folks. After their hormones kick in, they start thinking a lot less and make perfect little automatons for someone like La Plante to exploit. Of course, that's not to suggest they can't be cunning little beggars and get themselves into plenty of trouble, but it generally takes someone with an IQ in at least the low 80s to whip them into a destructive frenzy.

I pointed to myself. "I'm going to walk out to the middle of this area, and you'll send the girl to me. I'll turn over the chip to you. Keep your fingers off the triggers, and this might just go down well."

I didn't hear what the Chauffeur said to the grunges, but their gibbering stopped. I crossed to the center of the arena, using my magically enhanced senses as best I could to see if I'd just walked into a massive trap. The roof-mounted halogen lights caused a problem because they left the tops of the warehouses in an impenetrable darkness that did not do anything to make me feel at ease. I had to assume La Plante had people up there securing the high ground, but the fact that the only grunges I saw were leaning on his ride did not reassure me.

When I reached the middle, I stopped. The passenger door of the limo opened, and a slender woman of indeterminate age left it to stand beside the vehicle. She didn't look exactly like the disc footage I'd seen of her—yeah, everyone says that about CDs shot of them—but I knew instantly that she had to be Moira Alianha. The pale dress she wore was fashionably short and revealed legs I was almost willing to die for, but she quickly cloaked herself with a dark wool blanket to ward off the chill air.

With her head up and just the tips of her ears peeking out through the long veil of her midnight hair, she walked to me. I gave her a smile designed to inspire hope and confidence, but she ignored me and only saw the black and red raven patch on the shoulder of my jacket. She blinked twice, and then I thought she was going to faint.

I reached out and steadied her. "Easy now, Ms. Alianha. We're almost home."

She touched the patch with incredibly slender fingers. "My husband sent you?"

I frowned and figured she was confused. "I work for Richard Raven."

Moira smiled. "Yes, my husband to be."

I almost swallowed my tongue. "Huh? Say what?"

She just looked at me with vibrant green eyes.

Suddenly everything seemed to run to chaos in my head. "Does anyone else know who you are to Raven?"

Moira shook her head. "No, not here. Why?"

I let her question drift by unanswered. "Don't tell anyone, period." *If anyone finds out that she's close to Raven, her life won't be worth a melted CD, and she could be used to hold Raven back from dealing with scum like La Plante.* His aides, folks like me and Val, accept the dangers connected with belonging to Raven's group. Moira was lucky that La Plante had no idea of her true value, or this little exchange would be lots nastier.



The Chauffeur shouted at me. "Let's have the tea party and true confessions later. We want the chip now!"

Carefully, slowly, I reached into my jacket pocket. I withdrew from it a white piece of plastic about two inches square. The chip itself showed up in sharp contrast to the snowy plastic wafer to which it had been mounted. "I'll just put it down here."

I felt the plastic quiver and the chip explode as the bullet shot through it at Mach 4. The booming, rolling echo of the gunshot followed the bullet by a split-second, but I'd already turned and started to push Moira to safety. My right hand dropped the piece of plastic and enfolded the MP-9's pistol grip. I swept the gun around and snapped off two shots, one of which sent a headless grunge pitching back to the warehouse floor. I heard the staccato roar of Zig and Zag's Kalishnikov's and saw three more grunges drop out of sight amid sparks lancing from the limo's armored frame.

Gunmen hidden on the rooftops slowly stood, and their weapons lipped flame as I dragged Moira out of the killing zone. With so many people concentrating on just the pair of us I felt certain we'd be blasted to puppy chow before we'd gone a half-dozen steps, but the men on the roof started shooting at La Plante's grunges. The confused Orks returned the fire, but did so ineffectively because of the wealth of targets and the babble of orders being shouted by the Chauffeur.

I'd just propelled Moira through the narrow warehouse doorway when a bullet finally caught me. It blew into the back of my left thigh and ricocheted off to the left after it shattered my femur. It ripped free of my leg two inches left of and three below the entry point, tearing a chunk out of my femoral artery as it went.

I screamed, but as the echo of the scream died in my head, I heard the howl of a wolf rise in its place. Stumbling forward, I spilled onto the warehouse floor. My left knee hit hard and set another shockwave of pain through my leg. I tried to choke back another cry, but it came out as a lupine yelp.

I rolled over onto my back and pulled the MP-9 to me. "Move it, campers—get Moira out of here."

Val stared at the hole in my leg. "You're hit!"

I bit back the pain. "Yeah, my days in the big league are over. Maybe you can retire my uniform." I looked up at Zig and Zag. "Move it! I'll hold them off if I can. It's got to be Fujiwara yaks out there shooting the grunges up. That'll buy you some time, and I'll buy you more. Go!"

Zig made for the back door, but Moira shook her head and knelt beside me. "No, I'm not going. You need help."

She started making all the proper motions for a spell, but I closed a bloody hand around her fingers. "Save it, sister. You'll need all the magic you can muster to get the hell out of Seattle. Val, get her out of here."

Valerie crossed to Moira and rested her hands on her

WOLFGANG KIES

Mr. Kies, as he is known to everyone but his friends, is a rarity among shamans—he has the ability to actually take on the form of his totem. This ability is a double-edged sword, however. Although Wolf gives speed and strength, there is a price to be paid. Every time Wolfgang shape-shifts, he must battle with the Old One for control—and hope he wins.

Attribute	*Human Form*	*Wolf Form*	*Skills*
Body	4	7	Firearms 6
Quickness	4	6	Etiquette (street) 3
Strength	2	6	Conjuring 4
Charisma	4	—	Magikal Theory 3
Intelligence	4	4	Sorcery 4
Willpower	6	6	Stealth 4
Essence	6	(8)	
Reaction	4	5	

Wolfgang, as a troubleshooter for Dr. Raven, has access to any equipment he requires for a particular assignment (within reason—the doctor isn't made of nuyen).

Beretta "Viper" 14: The V14 is the forerunner of the Beretta 101T. Its clip holds 14 9mm bullets. It is an old but serviceable gun that lacks the power favored by most street samurai. Wolf's is modified to accept a silencer.

Type: Light *Concealability:* 7 *Ammo:* 14 (clip) *Damage:* 2M3 *Weight:* 1 *Cost:* ¥275.

H & K MP-9: The MP-9 was a short-run production model of a submachinegun put out to bridge the gap between the MP-5 and the popular HK227. The weapon itself has been heavily modified by Kid Stealth, but Wolf has refused to have anything more than the stock sights added to it. Wolf favors the MP-9 because it is also a 9mm caliber weapon, which means he only needs to cast his bullets in one size.

Type: SMG *Concealability:* 5 *Ammo:* 20 (clip) *Damage:* 4M3 *Cost:* ¥900.

Wolf's Silver Bullets: Wolf first had a gunsmith make up silver bullets with a silver nitrate core when he and Raven tracked the Full Moon Slasher. He has used them since then. While the 9mm shell is considered underpowered by many, it acts as a flechette round (–1 Power Level, +1 Staging). The only problem with the bullets (which are not manufactured in any great quantity) is that their penetration on walls or other armor-type targets is not good (–1 Staging). Still, the specially designed ammo will provoke an allergic reaction in any metahuman or magical creature vulnerable to silver and will induce kinetic trauma damage in just about anyone.

RONNIE KILLSTAR

Ronnie is typical of the new breed of cheap (in a moral, not an economic sense) thug that inhabits modern Seattle (and the metroplexes of other large cities as well). He's sold his soul to the corporate machine, and now does their dirty work.

Attribute	*Level*	*Skills*
Body	5	Armed Combat 4
Quickness	6	Bike 4
Strength	5	Etiquette (Street) 4
Charisma	6	Firearms 4
Intelligence	5	Stealth 5
Willpower	4	Unarmed Combat 5
Essence	5.6	
Reaction	5	

Cyberware: Retractable hand razors, vision magnification and low light.

shoulders, but the elf shrugged her off. "No. I can save you. I can fix your leg."

Inside my head the Old One growled seductively. "Let her fix you. Let her fill you with magic. Do as she asks, and I assure you the others will not follow."

"No!" I shouted at both of them.

Her emerald eyes flashed with an anger that told me my stay of execution had been denied. "Wait." I pulled the Viper from my belt and tossed it to Val.

She stared at it as if it were commercial software. "I don't want this."

I swallowed hard. "You might." I reached down and dipped the fingers of my left hand in my blood and painted twin parallel lines beneath each eye and across my forehead. "Do this, Moira, and then leave. All of you, get out of here. Don't look back, no matter what. Don't go looking for me. I'll find you, when I can."

Zig and Zag stared at me as if I'd gone mad, and Val shivered. Moira ripped my pants away around the wound and pressed her hands to it. She subvocalized a chant, but I felt warmth and a tingling flow from her hands into my leg. Almost instantly it nibbled the pain away. The energy continued to build and tissue began to heal—my body motivated to restructure itself at a rate that should have taken months. Even so, I knew the spell she wove was more than I needed.

And it was more than I could control.

I gritted my teeth and shoved her away. "Go, go!" I snapped at them. "Run!"

They vanished from sight just as the first tremor hit me. I shrieked as fire filled my ribs with molten agony. I heard the crack as my breastbone parted down the middle, thickened and broadened to accept the new angle of my expanded rib cage. I gnashed my teeth at the pain—my growing canine teeth split my lower lip.

"Don't fight it, Longtooth. It won't hurt so much," the Old One whispered.

Gotta retain some control! Can't let you run wild!

My long bones telescoped back down, shortening but strengthening my limbs. The muscles flowed into protoplasm as the transformation continued, then congealed into new muscles with new insertions able to exert more powerful pressure and leverage than before. My fingers and toes likewise shrank—the latter far more than the former—and organic claws grew to give me some new weaponry.

My head felt as if it were exploding when my jaw and facial bones broke. My whole face grew out into a muzzle, and my tongue lengthened along with it. The top of my head flattened somewhat, and my eye sockets sank back to a more protected position. According to the only person to watch me go through this lunacy, my eyes do not lose their silver color or the Killer Rings.

The bodily transformation almost complete as my pelt thickened and ears lengthened, I felt the Old One begin to gnaw on my resolve and humanity. I clung to the image of Dr. Raven sitting across from me as I changed and the sound of his voice telling me how to concentrate so I would not surrender to the beast inside me. "You have been blessed by the Wolf Spirit, greatly blessed, but that blessing will be a curse if you surrender yourself to him."

The Old One whimpered with disgust. "Someday Raven

will fail you, and you will become mine."

Stuff it, you mangy mutt. I've won this round.

The advent of three grunges storming through the warehouse door precluded any remark the Old One might have made. I gave them a toothy grin from the shadows. "My, my," I growled in a voice that even grunges knew to fear, "what fine little piggies we have here."

It took a bit more than fairy tale huffing and puffing to blow them all down, but the grunges didn't offer much more than that for a fight. They've never been much for hitting a moving target, and in my more compact wolf form I don't stay in one place very long. I left them in a leaking heap on the warehouse floor, then dashed out into the kill zone, doing my best to spit out grunge blood.

I couldn't have been much more than a gray blur as I streaked across the opening, but I felt the Chauffeur's eyes on me the whole time. I paused for a second at the place from which the rifle shot had come, but a yakuza forced me to tear out his throat before I had finished nosing around. I almost lost control with that kill, but, fortunately, the yak had some sort of augmentation that meant I got hydraulic fluid in addition to blood when I took him down.

Despite that hardship, my nose confirmed what I had earlier guessed. I took keen delight in watching the Chauffeur shudder when my joyous howl filled the warehouse district like the fog rolling in from the coast.

IV

Ronnie Killstar's eyes grew wide as the hole in my leg had been when he heard me release the cocking lever on the MP-9. Seated in his favorite chair, nestled deep in the shadows of his unlit living room, I spoke to him in a husky whisper. "Close the door. Sit down at the kitchen table."

"What's this?" He stared blankly at the little repast I'd prepared him while I waited.

I smiled at him. "That's your last meal."

The punk stared at me. "Milk and cookies?"

I shrugged. "It's the perfect thing for a little boy who doesn't know when he's not supposed to play adult games. If you'd have been content to just sell us out to Fujiwara, that would have worked fine."

He tried to look offended, but his nervousness betrayed him. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Can it, joeboy. Val and I cracked your personnel file, and it concluded with the last phone number you called. Later, when we broke into Fujiwara I recognized the same number. There was a connection."

Ronnie straightened up in his chair. "Circumstantial evidence."

I shook my head. "It would have been if you could have kept your ego in check. In the Weed you told me you could 'bullseye a rat's navel' at a klick in the dark. A chip's got to be four times the size of your average rat's navel, and the range wasn't nearly that long." I sighed. "And to top it off, you were still wearing that cologne of yours."

It suddenly dawned on him that I was going to kill him. The color drained from his face, and he looked at me with big puppy dog eyes. Yet before they could have their full sympathetic effect on me, his features sharpened, and a bit of the old, defiant fire reentered his bearing. "Wait a minute. I destroyed the chip you never really wanted to give to La Plante anyway. That's gotta count for something!"



I hesitated for a second, and hope blossomed on his face. Then I shook my head. "No, it doesn't. Dr. Raven had tipped Fujiwara about what we were going to do anyway. Fuji's programmers put a Trojan horse carrying a nasty virus in that chip that would have destroyed La Plante's computer system. The ambush, which didn't include your shooting of the chip, was just to make sure La Plante bought the whole thing as genuine."

Ronnie sank his head in his hands. "Go ahead, shoot me. I deserve it."

I lifted the MP-9's muzzle to the ceiling. "No, I think I prefer letting you wallow in your own mortification. Word to the wise, kid," I shot back over my shoulder as I went to the door, "remember that you're not as tough as you think. Don't let your delusions of adequacy get you in over your head—again."

On the way out I stopped the Chauffeur. "Don't bother."

The plastic-faced man stared hard at me. "I didn't hear a shot."

I gave him a wolfish grin and licked my lips. "You never do." I patted his cheek. "Ciao—no pun intended. Until it's just you and me." Ω

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Shadow Tiger

A Shadowrun Adventure Encounter

Lester W. Smith

Shadowrun adventures should be fast-moving and full of hints that more is going on behind the scenes than your PCs are picking up on. This is especially true when your shadowrunners are in an urban environment, where they are surrounded by untold numbers of NPCs with their own desires and goals. So what do you do when your players have really been on top of things, and they are already headed for the last scene in an adventure you thought would take them the rest of the night to finish? You give them an unexpected encounter, that's what. They'll never know that it was not originally designed as part of the adventure, and the world their shadowrunners live in will seem all the richer for it.

The following encounter has been designed as such a filler for use during the course of a regular adventure. As well, it can serve to equip the PCs more fully for the conclusion of your main adventure, if you so desire.

A FOX FROM THE DARKNESS

At some point as the shadowrunners are walking or driving down a city street on their way to the next stage in a mission, a young Oriental woman runs into their path from the mouth of an alley and cries, "Help me, please!" then stumbles and falls (preferably into the arms of your most chivalrous PC). The PCs notice immediately that her silken robe has been torn and bloodied in various places, and the woman has an open scalp wound a few inches above her left ear. In the rush of the next few seconds, the PCs are unlikely to notice anything else about the young woman, but you can roll perception tests for them secretly: If any pass a target number of 10, they will notice that there are no wounds visible through the gashes in her robe; if they pass a target number of 12, they catch a glimpse of her eyes as they close—eyes that reflect light like a cat's. (If for some reason a mage views her astrally, the mage will see her astral form as a tiger.) However, even if someone in the party notices such things, he will have little time to mention them before the next NPCs arrive. To simulate this situation, tell the players, "You all have one second to make a quick statement, starting now," and don't let them say anything once the time is up.

THE HOUNDS ARRIVE

As the shadowrunners are just beginning to react to the young woman's presence, a ragged handful of gang members trot out of the alley, armed with switchblades and heavy candlesticks. The gang members outnumber the shadowrunners by two, but they all look a little battered. (Use the Gang Member archetype on page 39 of the *Shadowrun* rules, and make them all Lightly Wounded and Lightly Fatigued. The candlesticks are silver, for reasons soon to be revealed, and can be treated as clubs in melee.) Upon spotting the shadowrunners, the leader of the gang members grates out, "That's our deb, chummers."

"Here, kitty, kitty," another gang member calls, and there are evil snickers from the rest of the group. The leader tells the shadowrunners, "Move along now, and you won't get hurt."

What self-respecting shadowrunner could avoid such an invitation to fight?

It is suggested that the referee run this combat using miniature figures to keep track of who is where, especially as the gang members will close with the shadowrunners to make gunfire a problem.

FOX BECOMES A TIGER

After combat has run for a couple of rounds, the referee can introduce the next element into the scenario. The shadowrunners hear a husky growl from behind them, then a tiger (literally) in a torn and bloody silk robe leaps into the fray, fighting on the side of the shadowrunners. Any wounds it takes in a round regenerate at the end of that round (that's right, it's a weretiger), except for Fatigue damage inflicted by the silver candlesticks (which the gang members will use as much as possible). The gang members will each fight on until Seriously Wounded, then will try to escape. The tiger will fight until it only has two points of Fatigue left before trying to escape.

Statistics for the weretiger are as follows:

Human Form: Body 5, Quickness 4, Strength 5, Charisma 5, Intelligence 3, Willpower 3, Essence 8, Reaction 5

Animal Form: Body 10, Quickness 7, Strength 10, Charisma 5, Intelligence 3, Willpower 3, Essence 8, Reaction 5.

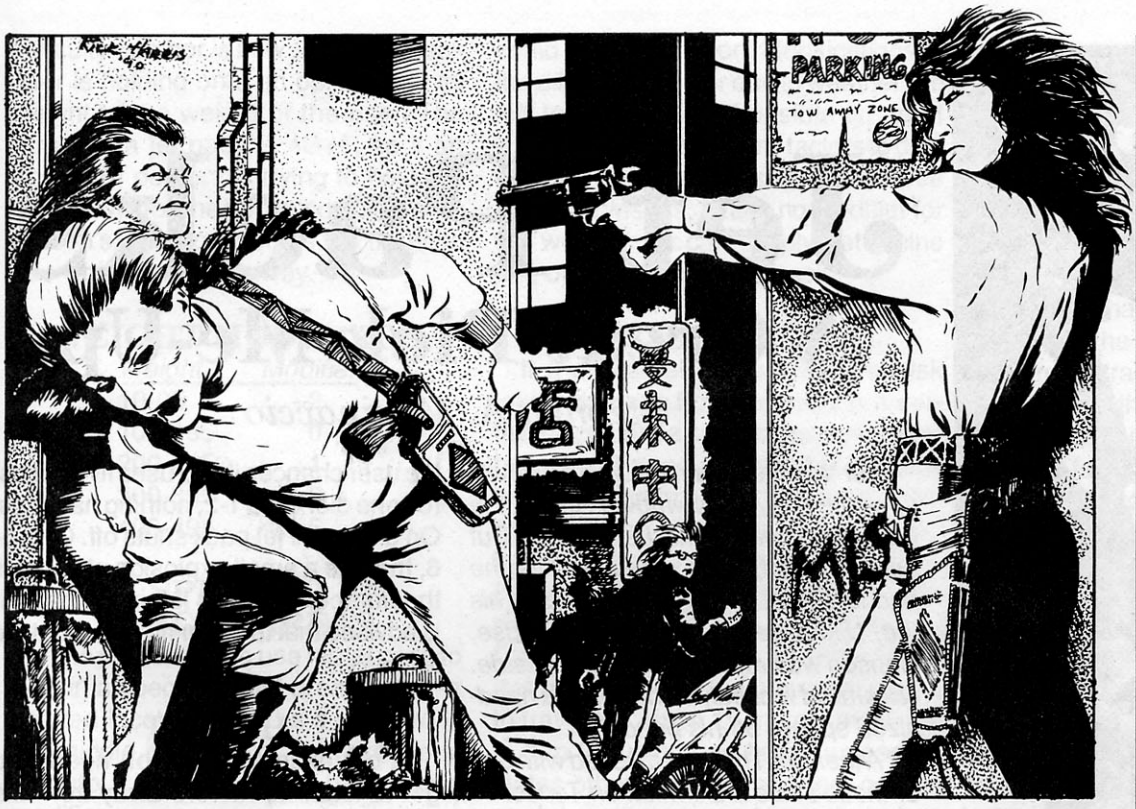
In human form, the creature does 5M1 Stun with fists; in animal form it does 9S3 Wound damage with +1 Reach. In either form, the creature has a Running Modifier of ×5.

AFTER THE FIGHT

After the fight is over, if the gang members have fled or are defeated, the weretiger will turn to face the shadowrunners if it is still conscious. It will crouch down protectively, growling to warn them off. If they have not attacked it already during the fight and if they do not do so now, after a few tense moments, the creature will revert to human form, gather the remnants of its robes about itself, and tell the PCs, "Follow, please," then turn and head back down the alley. (If the shadowrunners *have* attacked it at some point, after a warning growl it will flee.)

The creature speaks very little English, so it will not respond to questions the shadowrunners might ask, other than to repeat, "Follow, please."

If the shadowrunners follow, the weretiger will lead them to a dark doorway deep in the alley. Remnants of the door itself hang from twisted hinges, and burn marks attest to the fact that explosives were used to break it open. Inside, the PCs find a two-story apartment that has been ransacked recently. The bodies of four gang members lie lifelessly in the ground floor's main room amid the debris of expensive furnishings and a scattering of smashed magical artifacts. On the



A young Oriental woman runs from the mouth of an alley, crying for help. She is pursued by a handful of gang members armed with heavy candlesticks. "Here, kitty, kitty," one calls.

stairs leading to the second level lie the slashed body of an elderly mage and the smoking remains of two more gang members.

The second level consists of one open room with an extensive hermetic library, much laboratory apparatus, and a trio of hermetic circles. Both the library and the lab have been ransacked, and the circles have been defaced. (But the library retains a rating of 4 in Sorcery, 4 in Conjuration, and 7 in Magikal Theory, assuming that any shadowrunner mages take the time—half an hour per point—to search through the rubble. If the referee desires, a few magical spell focuses can be discovered as well.) The room also contains an empty steel cage in one corner, near the open door of which lie five dead gang members.

The weretiger points from itself to the cage. Then, pointing to the bodies of the gang members, it acts out the events that led up to its encounter with the shadowrunners. From that pantomime and the clues that lie scattered about the apartment, the shadowrunners can piece together the following tale.

THE WERETIGER'S STORY

Roger Salmud, the mage who owned this apartment, was growing old and feeling his power slip inexorably away. Theorizing that the regenerative powers of werecreatures might hold a secret to regenerating his own magical abilities, Salmud sought to obtain one of the creatures for study. Through contacts in China, he came into possession of a female weretiger, which he had shipped to his residence.

This evening, while Salmud studied the creature, a gang of street toughs decided to kill the old man and steal his possessions. But Salmud proved to be tougher than they had imagined; he took six of the gang members with him to the grave.

The rest of the gang set about trashing the place, until they discovered on the upper floor the iron cage containing a young Oriental woman. Figuring that the old mage was keeping her for his own perverse enjoyment, the gang leader opened the cage and dragged her out for the whole gang to have some fun with. They quickly discovered that they had a tiger by the tail, so to speak. Five of them fell to the creature's claws before someone picked up a silver candlestick, wholly by accident, and discovered that it could do permanent damage. The remaining gang members scrambled for candlesticks as well, and the weretiger leapt out a window and fled down the alley, where it stumbled upon the PCs. The gang members followed, intent on revenge, and the weretiger decided that with the shadowrunners' help, the odds were more to its liking.

ENDING THE ADVENTURE

From the weretiger's point of view, one thing remains to be done. It must escape the confines of the city and find a suitable wilderness to dwell in. Making its way across the city in the form of a disheveled young woman who speaks almost no English will be extremely tough, but trying to travel through the city in tiger form will draw unwelcome attention as well. If the shadowrunners accompany the creature to the city limits, it will be forever grateful to them and may serve as a wilderness contact in later adventures.

Besides this reward, of course, the shadowrunners also have the possibility of obtaining magical items and research materials at Salmud's apartment—items that might aid them in the course of whatever mission they were involved in before the weretiger stumbled into their midst. (And don't forget to give them a few valuables such as the silver candlesticks.) Of course, they might also have some healing to do before pressing on, but that's the nature of life for a shadowrunner. Ω



Jet Packs
A Great Pick-Me-Up

Stephen A. Marinaccio

Bret "No Fret" Hanson walked slowly down an alley in downtown Rakati. He was unwelcome, and he knew it. But before he left, there was one thing he had to settle. In front of him stood his foe, Nik, a traitor to the Rebel cause. Hanson was ready with blaster at side. Nik smiled wickedly as he pulled a hand-sized sphere off his bandolier.

"A thermal. I haven't messed with one of those since a skirmish on Tensor IV about a year and a half ago," Hanson thought, "and I don't want to start now."

Too late. Nik had already pitched the thermal detonator. He showed an odd sense of delight as it landed solidly next to Hanson's left foot. Although 25 meters is a pretty safe distance to be away from one of those things, Hanson knew that he could not run that far in the approximately 10 seconds until it detonated. But Hanson wasn't one to fret. He cleared his mind and set his jet pack for two bursts.

A jet pack can be bought at any major spaceport for around 350 credits with a full tank of fuel. A standard jet pack holds 24 bursts. Some pirates have been known to expand on their fuel tank to allow it to hold up to 32 bursts, but this is not common. Extra fuel can be bought in places that sell jet packs for about 50 credits per eight bursts.

RULES

When using a jet pack, make all rolls with the Mechanical attribute or Mechanical skill, Jet Pack Operations. The base difficulty number when using a jet pack is 10. This is modified by the height which the pack's user wishes to achieve, the user's weight, specific target areas (STAs), and planetary modifiers.

If a jet pack is used for five or more consecutive bursts, it may overheat. If the user chances it and uses five bursts, roll one die. On a 1-2, nothing happens. On a 3-4, the jet pack shuts off. On a 5-6, there is a small explosion at 2D plus the number of bursts left in the pack. It is advised that the user not overheat the jet pack.

HEIGHT

In our example, Hanson needed to get at least 25 meters away from the thermal detonator in about 10 seconds (two turns). Running would only take him as far as 20 meters, at which time he could take damage. Hanson frowns upon damage. A single burst from a jet pack can propel the user 15 meters, per turn, in any direction. The user can cut the power and stop before reaching 15 meters, but the burst is still completely used. Hanson used his two bursts to send himself straight up. Using one burst takes one turn, so Hanson will reach his desired 25 meter height in two turns. Hanson's modified difficulty number is 12 (base 10 plus a modifier of two due to the desired height).

DESIRED HEIGHT MODIFIERS

Desired Height	*Modifier*	*Bursts Needed*
10 m	–1	1
15 m	0	1
20 m	+1	2
25 m	+2	2
30 m	+3	2
35 m	+4	3
40 m	+5	3
45 m	+6	3
50 m	+7	4
55 m	+8	4
60 m	+9	4

WEIGHT

Hanson, with equipment, weighs 226 pounds. Due to his weight, his modified

difficulty number is now 13. If a jet pack user is holding onto an object, add its weight to the weight of the user. The thrust of a jet pack is 4D+1, so if an object (or person) is trying to hold the user down, roll the opposing object's (or person's) Strength versus the thrust to see which one gives way.

WEIGHT MODIFIERS

Weight	*Modifier*
10-95	–2
100-195	0
200-295	+1
300-395	+3
400-495	+5

SPECIFIC TARGET AREAS

If the user wants to use his jet pack to land in a specific target area (STA)—a desired location such as a window, in the middle if a pack of stormtroopers, or onto a landspeeder—he gains a modifier.

If the specific target area is a stationary area or object, add three to his difficulty number. If the area or object is moving, add six.

PERFORMING OTHER ACTIONS

While Hanson is rocketing skyward, he doesn't waste time getting even with Nik. Hanson draws his blaster—to hit Nik, he will need a 13. This is modified by one for every burst the user intends to use.

Hanson intends to use two, so his difficulty number to hit Nik is now 15 (13+2). He rolls a hit. Nik now lies unconscious in the Rakati alley.

PLANETARY MODIFIERS

Two major factors could affect jet pack operation.

Gravity is the first. All planets have some variation in their gravitational field, although most planets in the *Star Wars* universe are assumed to have about the same relative gravity as Earth (which we will arbitrarily call "standard"). Accounting for variations in gravity is simple: If the planet has a higher than standard field, add two to the difficulty number; if it has a lower than standard field, subtract two. In our example, Hanson is on a standard planet, so there is no modifier.

Weather is the second factor that could affect operation. Modifications to the difficulty number due to weather are left to the referee. Possible types of weather involve too many factors to deal with in an article of this size. The referee can, if he wishes, attach no modifier for the weather, or can simply determine one on a case-by-case basis.

CUTTING POWER

If a character doesn't want to risk taking damage from thrusting to a certain height, or if a situation occurs where he doesn't need or want his jet pack turned on, he may cut the power. Hanson aimed for 25 meters as his desired height. This is not a multiple of 15—therefore, he must have cut his power partway through his second burst. Cutting power still uses an entire burst. It is assumed that the character wants to travel the entire 15 meters available to him for using one burst, unless he states otherwise. No modifiers or rolls apply to cutting power. All the player has to do is state, "I'm cutting the power."

SUCCESS OR NOT

Now is the moment of truth. Hanson has a Jet Pack Operations skill of 3D. His modified difficulty number is 13. He rolls a 12 and misses the desired height of 25 meters—but by how much?

Whenever anyone misses, roll a number of dice equal to the number of bursts used. Remember that if a character cut the power, it is still counted as an entire burst. Hanson used two bursts, so he now rolls 2D6. He rolls a 7. This is subtracted from the desired height: 25–7=18. The actual height achieved is 18 meters. Since two turns have gone by, the thermal detonator explodes, and 18 meters is within a 2D damage radius. Damage is rolled normally, resulting in a stun. Hanson shrugs it off.

HASTE BURST

If a character was going for a STA or doesn't really want to fall because he's only two or three meters from his destination, he can take a haste burst. This uses one burst and adds 1D+1 to the actual height achieved. If Hanson had wanted to, he could have done a haste burst and added 1D+1 to 18 and gotten out of the blast radius. If a character does perform a haste burst, any actions performed in the following turn take a –1D penalty.

STAR WARS

DESCENT

Hanson hangs momentarily as the gravity of the planet takes over. Since he thrust straight up, nothing is under him now. In this case, or if a character misses his target and nothing is under him, he falls. The two ways to fall are freefall and controlled descent.

Freefalling is handled as per the rules found on page 53 of the *Star Wars: The Roleplaying Game* rule book. This situation occurs when the character tries in no way to slow his fall. Use the actual height achieved when referring to the chart on page 141 of *Star Wars: The Roleplaying Game* .

Controlled descent takes place when a character uses his jet pack to slow his fall. The character may use as many bursts as he likes to slow his descent, but remember the rule on overheating. For every burst used, a character knocks 2D of damage off the damage code from the table found on page 141 of the *Star Wars: The Roleplaying Game* rule book. Therefore, Hanson could use two bursts and take no falling damage.

However, Hanson elects not to use his pack for controlled descent because he is running low on fuel and may need the few bursts he has left later in the day. Hanson is 18 meters up and freefalls. The damage code is 5D, rolled normally against Hanson's Strength, resulting in a wound.

IN CLOSING

Jet packs are not used every day in the *Star Wars* universe, but these optional rules are simple enough for a quick determination of success or failure when some swashbuckling member of the Rebel Alliance decides to get "hop happy."

Hanson rose and brushed himself off as he made his way toward Nik's body. Nik lay motionless as Hanson mumbled something about revenge and justice, slapping binders on Nik's wrists and heaving his limp body over his shoulder. This was one traitor who was going to stand trial before the Rebel high command. Ω

Warhammer by the Numbers

Statistical Balance in *Warhammer 40,000/Rogue Trader*

Craig Sheeley

"Drokk!" the last marine cursed, grasping his bolt gun in his good hand

costs 106 points. Another squad with a heavy plasma gun would bring the

Unfortunately, the marines lost around 40 to 50 percent of their force

2 OVER THE TOP

"Lissen up, ladz!" Thrugg shouted over the din of his followers' griping. "We've legged it a long wayz f'r a reason terday. I've been on me toes, oi 'ave. Over this 'ere 'ill, there's a piece o' th' spuggin' 'uman git wall. We're goin' ter rush it!" Muttered grumbles rippled through the ranks as the Orks digested this announcement. "An' th' best part ov it is, this piece o' wall is held by ironbuttz, not skinnybuttz! Better eatin' all 'round!"

The grumbles intensified. Gharpilger spoke for them all when he piped up. "Bashin' ironbuttz i'n't exzackly a best part, boss. They're bloody rough pickins, so they are."

Thrugg drew his plasma pistol, his lips splitting to expose yellowed, tusk-like teeth. Gharpilger cringed, but the chief Ork did nothing more sinister than wave his energy gun in a circle over his head. "It'll be easier than yer think," Thrugg retorted confidently. "Ironbuttz're supposed ter be so good, they don't give 'em lottsa gunz 'n' stuff ter shoot wit'. But o' course you lot wouldn't think about that—that's why oi'm th' boss 'ere."

A hissing, clanking, thudding noise overlaid by the sound of a powerful engine startled the troopers. They whirled, weapons ready. Thrugg smirked. A warmachine lurched down the draw, emerging from a clump of tree-like plants. "Did I fergit ter mention Argshak an''s ladz? Lumme—so oi did. 'Es decided ter come along f'r th' fun ov it." A low growl of approval arose from the troops. Rushing marine-held walls would definitely be easier with some mobile guns backing them.

"Awright, git in position 'ere! Once we getz past th' wall, we c'n 'ave lotz ov fun!"

Cultural Note: "Ironbuttz" means powered-armor marines. "Skinnybuttz" are lightly armored humans.

Forces

In this scenario, Ork and marine forces are limited by each other's available figures. There may not be more Orks than marines, and vice versa. Orks are standard troopers as above, except for those Ork figures carrying different weapons—figures are armed with the weapons they are carrying.

The marines are standard as above, but one of them must be designated a librarian, a level 1 psyker. Marine figures carrying heavy weapons are armed with those weapons. The marines may have up to one heavy weapon per two troopers if heavy weapons figures are available.

Both the marines and the Orks have heavy support. The Orks have their warmachine (detailed below), and the marines have a megacannon about three kilometers behind their lines, assigned to assist this unit.

Only an officer, a sergeant, the librarian or a veteran trooper may call in the artillery fire from the megacannon. To do so, the spotter calling in the fire may not move, fire or reserve move during that turn. The cannon fires first in the Marine Fire Phase. The shot deviates automatically but is still likely to maul something.

Each squad usually has one veteran trooper. Vet troopers are no different from regular marines, but they often serve as fireteam leaders when the squad splits into two five-man fireteams.

Ork Warmachine: *Land Speed:* 10 *Acc/Dec:* 5 *TRR:* 1 *Cap:* 5 *T:* 8 *D:* 20 *Sv:* 5-6 *E:* 4 *W:* ?.

Equipment: Targeter for autocannon, communicator, power field, power field synchronizer.

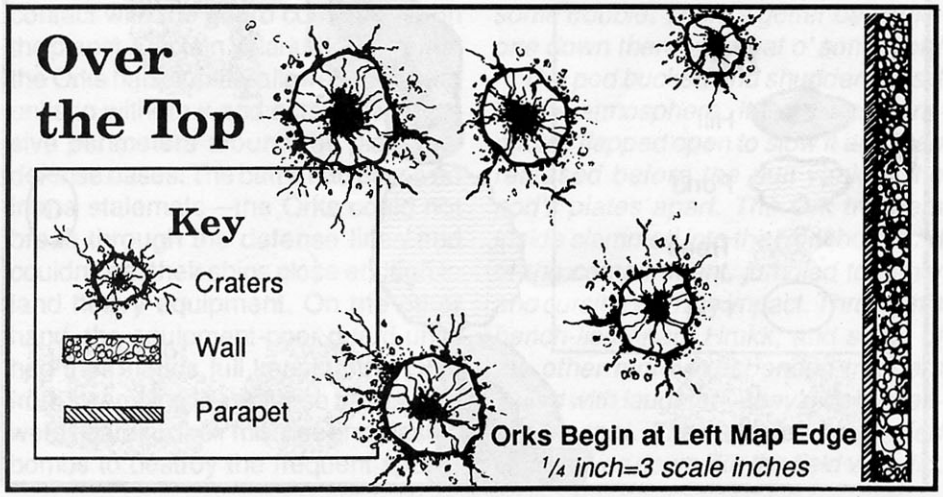
Armament: Depends on the model.

The Ork warmachine can be simulated by any reasonably sized vehicle—a tank model, walker, armored car, etc. It uses whatever land movement is appropriate—if a tank, tracked; if a hovercraft, hover; if a walker, walking, and so on. The warmachine must have at least one weapon, the autocannon. Other weapons on the model are as follows: Machineguns are heavy bolters, and smoke-launchers are missile or grenade launchers.

Terrain

The marines are defending a section of the defensive perimeter. In this case, the perimeter is walled with a three-meter-high wall topped by a parapet. Anyone behind the parapet is counted as being in hard cover. The Orks advance across crater-dotted terrain to attack the wall. In case a PC wishes to knock down parts of the wall, the parapet is Toughness 6, Damage 3, and the wall is Toughness 8, Damage 10. Each section destroyed knocks a one-inch hole in whatever was destroyed—the warmachine will probably have to knock a three-inch hole in the wall to get past it. Destroyed parapets give no cover bonus.

The wall can be scaled. All figures are able to climb up and down the wall at will. In order to do this, a figure sacrifices all movement during a phase (the wall can be scaled during the Reserve Movement Phase). Figures climbing the wall cannot fire in the turn they climb. They can attack HTH at a –1 to skill as per regular rules. Figures may not charge on the turn they climb the wall.



Victory Conditions

The side which accumulates the most victory points wins.

Marines: Each trooper surviving when all Ork units are dead or off the board is one point. Each Ork killed is one point. Ork warmachine destroyed is five points.

Orks: Each Ork off the board on the marine side, behind the wall, is three points.

Ork warmachine off the board on the marine side, behind the wall, is five points.

3 BREKKIE IN BED

The human camp lay silent in the early dawn. Thrugg checked his troops again. A dozen of them had made it through the enemy lines, and now they were ready to do a dirty on the skinnybuttz below. Satisfied that his lads were set, Thrugg waved them quietly forward.

Forces

The scenario presents a dawn ambush as Thrugg and his Ork raiders attack a militia encampment. Thrugg has 12 Ork troopers at his command, armed as in the first scenario except that they have no frag grenades left. The militia troopers are standard humans, armed and equipped as Imperial Guards.

See the Profiles Table below for statistics.

Militia Trooper Standard Equipment: Flak armor, communicator las-gun, knife.

There are two 10-man squads, each consisting of one sergeant with las-pistol and chainsword instead of a las-gun, eight troopers with standard equipment, and one trooper with las-cannon and suspensors instead of a las-gun.

The militia is different from the Imperial Guard in the fact that its squads are further split into five-man teams, with each sergeant and las-cannon trooper in charge of one fireteam. Morale checks are made per fireteam, not per squad.

Setup

The militia troopers are asleep in their tents. They have posted two sentries, as marked. Thrugg and the Orks enter from any side. The Orks may sneak onto the table, moving only during their normal movement phase and giving up their Reserve Movement Phase for the sake of stealth. Sneaking in reduces the chance of being detected.

Each time the Orks move (during Normal and Reserve Movement phases), each sentry rolls one die to determine if he detects the Orks. If the Orks are not sneaking, a roll of 4, 5, or 6 means the sentry has detected them. The Orks are automatically detected if a weapon is fired or a hand-to-hand attack fails to kill a militiaman (he's screaming for help and the Ork attacker failed to shut him up).

When the Orks are detected, the militiamen wake up. Only the sentries may act during the militia turn after the Orks are detected. In the turn following the first detection turn, all militiamen may move and act normally.

Only the sentries and sergeants are armed. The las-guns and las-cannons are stacked in the weapons rack and remain there until the end of the next militia movement phase.

In short, a militia figure must move next to the rack, stay there for the rest of the turn without doing anything but defending if attacked hand-to-hand, and not move his next turn.

After the second movement phase next to the rack, the militia figure may proceed to act normally, including firing in the fire phase following the movement phase.

WARHAMMER 40,000

Terrain Features

The tents count as soft cover for soldiers inside them. The first hand-to-hand attack made on targets inside a tent is at –1 WA due to the fact that the targets cannot be clearly seen. After the first attack, the tent is torn enough to see clearly.

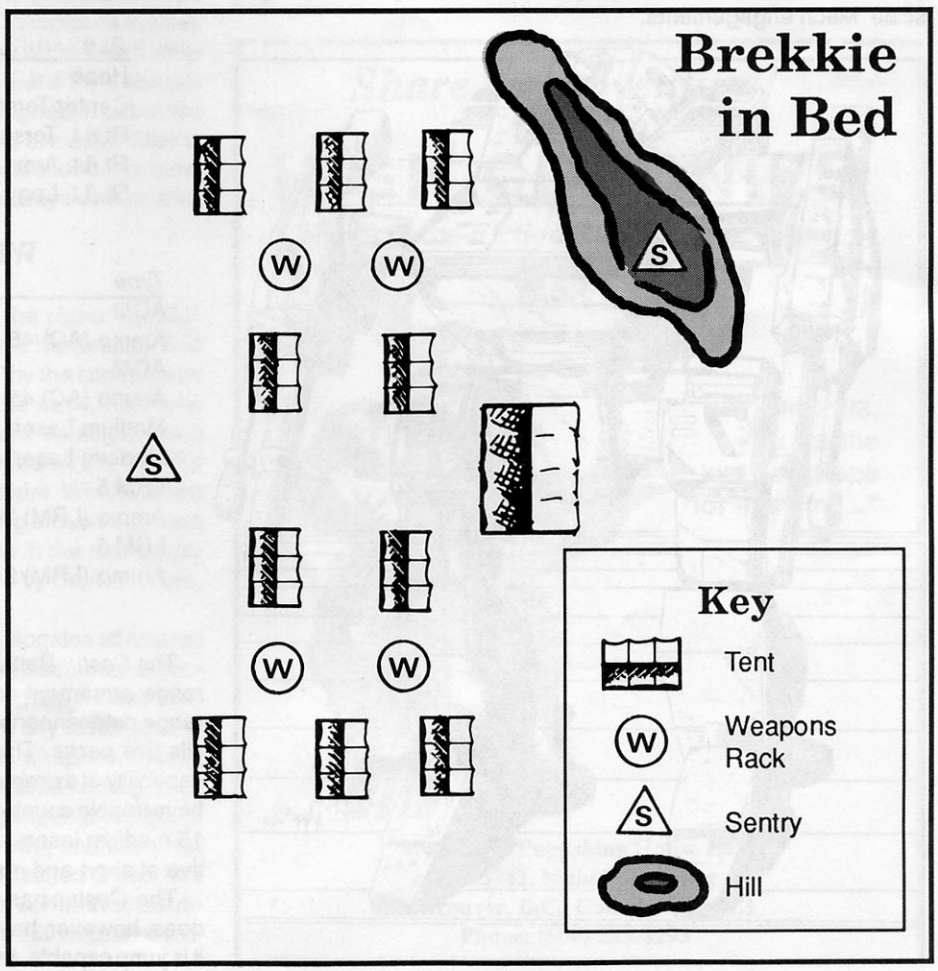
Tents block line of sight.

Victory Conditions

The militiamen win if they can kill or rout the Orks off the table. The Orks win if they kill all the militiamen. Ω

PROFILES TABLE

Profile	*M*	*WS*	*BS*	*S*	*T*	*W*	*I*	*A*	*Ld*	*Int*	*Cl*	*WP*
Marine	4	4	4	4	3	1	4	1	8	8	8	8
Trooper	4	3	3	3	4	1	2	1	7	6	7	7
Hrukk	4	4	4	4	4	1	3	1	7	6	7	7
Thrugg	4	5	5	4	5	2	4	2	8	7	8	8
Militia	4	3	3	3	3	1	3	1	7	7	7	7



CST-3S *CESTUS*

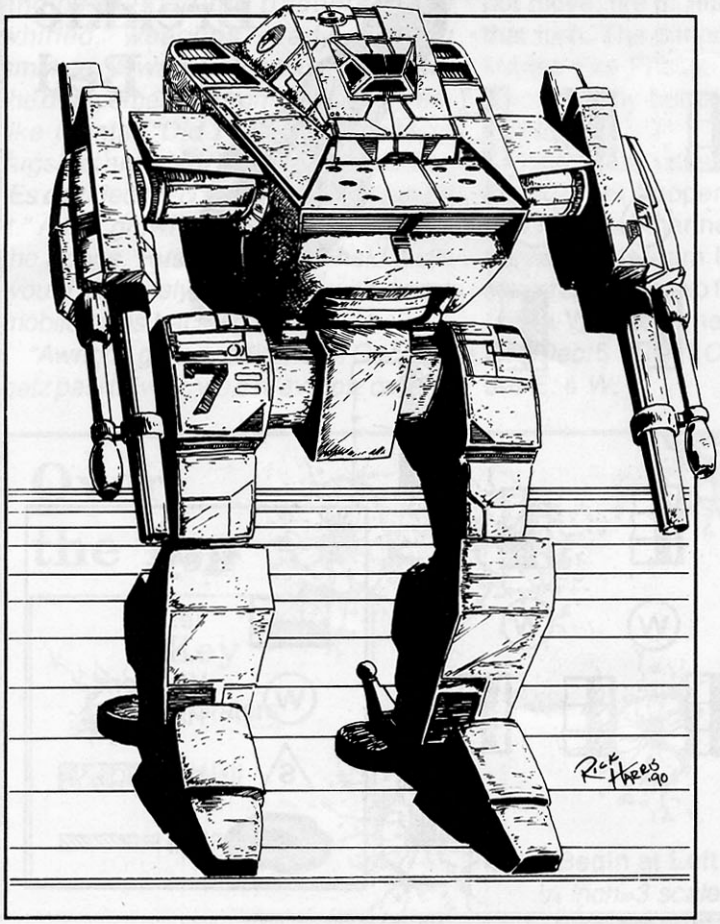
Technical Data Readout for a Heavy BattleMech

Dale L. Kemper

With hard-hitting capability at extremely long ranges that even today's newest 'Mechs have trouble countering, the CST-3S *Cestus* type heavy BattleMech is very useful in its designed role of long-range support for heavy assaults. The House of Steiner is currently fabricating new components for the *Cestus,* but the other Successor States seem to be phasing out the 'Mech for newer, more available types. Originally numbering 100,000, only about five percent remain in operation, mainly due to a serious lack of spare parts and components.

The *Cestus* is one of the older heavy 'Mech vehicles remaining in the Succession States' forces. First produced in A. D. 2555, the *Cestus* was very popular in the glory days of the old Star League. Approximately 100,000 of these 'Mechs were constructed before the beginning of the Succession Wars. Unfortunately only some five percent of them are still in operation today, mainly due to the serious lack of spare parts and components for an older design such as this. Currently, the House of Steiner is fabricating new components for the *Cestus,* but the other Successor States seem to be phasing out the 'Mech for newer, more available types.

The *Cestus* was designed for long-range support of heavy assaults, and as such was usually assigned directly to the assault lances in a 'Mech regiment. Occasionally this organizational method was modified so that the *Cestus* was assigned to a support lance instead. With its extensive array of long-range weapons and heavy armor, the *Cestus* had the staying power necessary in many large-scale 'Mech engagements.



Mass: 65 tons.
Chassis: Technicron type B (modified).
Power Plant: Magna 260.
Cruising Speed: 46.7 km per hour.
Maximum Speed: 62.6 km per hour.
Jump Jets: Rawlings 55.
Jump Capacity: 120 meters.
Armor: Rigid TBC, Type II.
Armament: Two Linblad long-range autocannons, two Diverse Optics type 15 medium lasers, two Halberd VI long-range missile five packs.
Main Manufacturer: Technicron Manufacturing.
Communications System: AllComm 250.
Targeting and Tracking System: Chichester ASR-14.
Tonnage: 65 tons.
Internal Structure: 6.5 tons.
Engine: 260 Magna, 13.5 tons.
Walking MPs: 4.
Running MPs: 6.
Jumping MPs: 4.
Heat Sinks: 12, 2 tons.
Gyro: 3 tons.
Cockpit: 3 tons.
Armor Factor: 208, 13 tons.

ARMOR VALUE

Part	*Int. Structure*	*Armor Value*
Head	3	9
Center Torso	21	35/8
Rt./Lt. Torso	15	24/6
Rt./Lt. Arm	10	20
Rt./Lt. Leg	14	28

WEAPONS AND AMMO

Type	*Loc.*	*Critical*	*Tons*
AC/2	RA	3	6
Ammo (AC) 45	RA	1	1
AC/2	LA	3	6
Ammo (AC) 45	LA	1	1
Medium Laser	RA	1	1
Medium Laser	LA	1	1
LRM 5	RT	1	2
Ammo (LRM) 24	RT	1	1
LRM 5	LT	1	2
Ammo (LRM) 24	LT	1	1

CAPABILITIES

The *Cestus* BattleMech is very useful in its designed role. Its long-range armament consists of double, arm-mounted Linblad long-range autocannons and torso-mounted Halberd VI long-lange missile five packs. This combination gives the *Cestus* a hard-hitting capability at extremely long ranges that even today's newest 'Mechs have trouble countering. Arm-mounted, double, Diverse Optics Type 15 medium lasers also give the 'Mech an offensive weapon effective at short and medium ranges.

The *Cestus* has average maneuverability for a heavy 'Mech. It does, however, have an advantage over most large 'Mechs in that it is jump capable. Its twin Rawlings 55 jump jets have enabled many

of these vehicles to take advantage of a tactical situation or escape from one that has turned sour. With its additional heat sinks installed, the *Cestus* still retains most of its offensive capability even during jump jet operations.

BATTLE HISTORY

During the First Succession War numerous *Cestus* BattleMechs were part of all front-line forces of the Successor States. Because of this their losses were quite high. During the occupation of Malory by House Kurita forces, every *Cestus* 'Mech in the 10 invading regiments was either disabled or destroyed in all-out fighting against the House Davion defenders. By the Second Succession War the number of operational *Cestus* 'Mechs had dropped dramatically. The surviving units were usually used for long-range support and rarely got into heavy combat situations.

More recently, during the Battle of Ellison in A.D. 3015, a support lance of the House Davion invaders composed mainly of *Cestus* Type 'Mechs was forced to defend against an intensive counterattack by House Laio defenders. With the attackers charging through thickly forested terrain, the long-range capability of the *Cestus* was made impotent, and the heavy 'Mechs were forced to fight at a disadvantage closer in. Within a few minutes, the Davion support lance was overwhelmed by a reinforced lance of Laio medium 'Mechs. The entire House Davion invasion group was forced to fall back and regroup, giving the House of Laio one of its rare glimpses of victory.

VARIANTS

The most prominent variant of the *Cestus* involves the removal of the jump jet machinery, the additional heat sinks, and two tons of armor so that long-range missile 10 packs can replace the five packs installed in the left and right torso of the standard model. Although this modification creates an ammunition problem (the *Cestus* type 'Mech's missile storage lockers are very difficult to increase in size), this variant increases the long-range hitting power of the 'Mech while sacrificing some of its defensive ability. It is felt that if the *Cestus* is used in the long-range support role as it is designed, most of the defensive components will not be as necessary, since the 'Mechs should never be involved in heavy combat situations. As most MechWarriors will tell you, however, you can't always dictate what kind of combat situation you will be in.

NOTABLE USERS

During the withdrawal of Kurita forces from the planet Sanderson in A.D. 2963, MechWarrior Regie Nogales and his *Cestus*, "Bad Boy III," were listed as "missing, presumed lost" by the commander of the 4th Galedon Regulars. This was not the case, however. Nogales' 'Mech had sustained considerable head damage, which had knocked the pilot unconscious and destroyed all the 'Mech's directional antennae for its communications system. When the last Kurita dropship lifted off, Nogales was just coming around in a deep gully some 20 klicks away. When he tried to reach the now empty landing zone, Nogales was immediately spotted by Davion forces, and the chase began.

Using his long-range weapons to good effect, Nogales attempted to evade the pursuing lance and find time to rig replacement antennae. With the broken and rough nature of the terrain, he was able to use his jump jets to good advantage. He kept any faster enemy scouts from getting near by using his long-range weapons. Finally, Nogales was able to contact the ships of the Kurita raiding force just before they left orbit and headed for their jumpship. A flight of aerospace fighters was dispatched to support him, and the small *Leopard*-class dropship *Tayatumo Maru* was detached to pick him up to rejoin his unit. Upon his reunion with his comrades, he received the Order of Dracone Second Class for his excellent tactics. Ω

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Boxed role-playing game. 144-page Rule Book, 80-page World Book, 48-page Adventure Book, 156-card Drama Deck, 20-sided die, and 16-page newsletter.

Over the years, there has been an increasing tendency for role-playing games to cross the boundaries between genres. At first, this was manifested in rules that allowed statistics to be translated from one game to another, such as TSR's *Gamma World* containing conversion charts for *Advanced Dungeons and Dragons* statistics.

Before long, game companies began producing role-playing games based upon common sets of core rules. Chaosium's *Runequest*, *Call of Cthulhu*, and *Ringworld* are all interrelated, for example, as are Palladium's *Palladium RPG*, *Heroes, Unlimited*, and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*; Hero Games' *Champions*, *Fantasy Hero*, and *Star Hero*; and Iron Crown Enterprises' *Rolemaster*, *Space Master*, and *Middle-Earth Role-Playing*, to name a few. In each case, players can transfer characters from one genre to another with a minimal amount of trouble. Steve Jackson Games went a step further in producing *GURPS*, the basic rules of which are in one package, with extra rules needed for specific genres published separately. Last year saw the next step in genre-crossing, with the release of FASA's *Shadowrun*, a game that merges cyberpunk and fantasy into one milieu.

Torg, West End's newest role-playing game (which releases this month), furthers that genre-crossing tradition, melding fantasy, horror, sci-fi, cyberpunk, espionage, pulp adventure, and more into one world. Does this juxtaposition of genres work? Yes—surprisingly well. In part, this success is the result of the overarching mythos that makes sense of everything. But it is also the result of a well developed rules system that integrates diverse equipment and skills into a smooth whole. Finally, it involves the use of the Drama Deck, a creation that makes *Torg* something more than just another RPG.

TORG MYTHOS

Imagine that the universe of our Earth is just one cosm in an "infiniverse." Other cosms have other worlds in which different natural laws and histories hold sway. What is possible in one cosm may be impossible in another.

For instance, our cosm has fairly high technological possibilities but very low magical ones. Earth, then, is said to have a high technological axiom but a low magical one. It also rates pretty high on the Social scale, but lower on the Spiritual scale, these being the other two axioms that *Torg* rates cosms by.

Notice that these axioms are not inflexible: A group of scientists working to develop a new technology would create a temporary increase in a cosm's Technological axiom, for instance, and as word of the new techology's existence spread, the temporary gain in axiom level would grow more universal, eventually becoming the rule. Similarly, as skepticism of paranatural events increased, a cosm's Spiritual axiom level would decline.

Even a slight difference in the level of one axiom is enough to identify two cosms as separate from each other, as realms of differing possibilities. To prevent the chaos of conflicting possibilities, each cosm is sealed off from all the others by Everlaws that ensure the purity of the cosm's natural laws. But there is great energy inherent in the differences between cosms, energy that can be tapped by breaching the boundaries between them.

In *Torg*, someone called the Gaunt Man has discovered how to breach those boundaries and draw the resulting possibility energy into himself. The Gaunt Man's ultimate purpose is to absorb enough energy to become Torg, an immortal, godlike being. The Earth has come to his attention as a cosm particularly rich in possible connections to other cosms (therefore in possibility energy) rich enough to make him Torg, but too rich to conquer without help. Recruiting other High Lords for aid (cosm-crossing conquerors like himself), the Gaunt Man has led an assault on our Earth. In this assault, each High Lord has established a bridge projecting his own realm onto some geographical region of our world.

Indonesia and Malaysia now lie within the Gaunt Man's realm of horror. Japan and parts of the Far East have quietly fallen under the shadow of Kanawa Corporation, an Imperial realm of very high technology and mystical martial arts. In Northern Africa and the Middle East, the weird science and (modest) superheroism of early pulp adventures hold sway within Dr. Mobius' New Empire of the Nile. France languishes in a new Dark Ages under the God-Net of the Cyberpapacy. And much of North America is now the province of a Living Land of shamans and reptile people. What remains unconquered (partly due to infighting between the invaders) is collectively called Core Earth.

Player Characters

Most inhabitants of a region that becomes part of an alien realm soon become acclimated to the new axioms, forgetting the workings of their native cosm as possibility energy is leached from them. Player characters are special individuals, however, in whom possibility energy still resides. This energy allows them to travel from realm to realm, taking their native axioms with them. They can even change the course of "real" events by expending portions of this energy (changing a gunshot wound from a direct hit to a near miss, for example).

Due to their affinity to the possibility storms that occur as cosms mix, the PCs are called "Stormers" by the bad guys, "Storm Knights" by the good. (As in the *Star Wars* role-playing game, West End casts the player characters firmly in the role of heroes—no chaotic evil PCs in this game.)

Because of the nature of the mythos, *Torg* PCs come with a ready-made

Lester W. Smith

mission—to drive the invaders from their planet (or, perhaps more realistically, to at least prevent them from gaining any more ground). Primarily, this mission involves locating and removing certain devices, called "stelae," that set up each invading realm's perimeter, allowing that realm to exist in our cosm at all.

There are complications, however. Remember that when an invading realm takes over a region of Earth, that region's inhabitants become acclimated to the new reality as they are stripped of possibility energy. Well, without possibility energy, they cannot survive the shift back if the stelae are removed. So the Storm Knights must first restore possibility energy in the inhabitants by performing deeds of glory. As tales of these deeds spread, they *may* prepare the people for a shift back to Core Earth reality. Of course, performing deeds of glory means risking the reprisals of the local high lord, a major complication in itself.

Newsletter

That is what adventuring in *Torg* is all about: It is a very flexible environment. The PCs can change the face of the globe by their actions, and the referee can certainly use the setup to launch new invasions, establishing new genres in which to adventure. West End intends for individual gaming groups to submit their accomplishments for publication in an ongoing newsletter (the first issue of which is included in the game), an organ which will also contain new developments by West End. The result should be an ever-changing world to adventure in.

GAME MECHANICS

We've all heard the arguments about realism versus playability. Games that stress realism tend to play slowly, and they require players to remember great numbers of rules—or at least where to look them up. Games that stress playability can end up too simple, creating the unsatisfying feeling that shotguns are like pistols are like flamethrowers are like crossbows: You just roll a die and see how many hit points the target loses. Most people tend to like a game that strikes a balance between the two extremes.

But the more wide-ranging a game's subject matter, the more difficult that is to do. So how does *Torg*, a game that stretches across all genres, attack this problem? The answer is twofold. It involves a 20-sided die and a set of tables—at the heart of which is the *Torg* Value Chart.

Using the Die

Pretty much everything a PC attempts to do in *Torg* is adjudicated by the roll of 1D20. On the front of each PC sheet is a table that converts the die roll into a modifier (positive or negative) that is added to one of the PC's statistics, with or without a skill bonus. The resulting number is compared against a difficulty rating (which includes such things as a target's defensive adjustments) to determine success or failure, with extra points determining the quality thereof. PCs and equivalently rated NPCs get to reroll the die on a roll of 10 and add the rolls together, on a 10 or 20 if they have a skill appropriate to the task. Normals reroll on a 10 if they have an appropriate skill, but never on a 20.

Torg Value Chart

Torg includes a number of tables to use for determining target numbers for



tasks, but they all revolve around a basic one called the *Torg* Value Chart. (Besides being in the appropriate places in the rules, these tables are collected together in an eight-page pull-out section for easy reference.) The *Torg* Value Chart is a logarithmic scale for translating real-world "measures" into *Torg* "values." Need to find a target number for a character who wants to lift an elephant? Just look for the measure of an elephant's weight on the chart, and you'll find the value you need.

The basic measures are calculated in seconds, kilos, and meters, but another table gives modifiers to be added to the resultant value number for conversions from other units of measure. So you can even use the chart to convert one unit of measure to another. You simply take the first measure, turn it into a value, adjust that value with the applicable modifier(s), then use the table to turn it back into a measure.

Keep in mind that the measures are expressed in ranges, and as the chart is logarithmic, the further along the scale you go, the greater the range involved. In other words, one minute translates to a range of 41 to 60 seconds, and we all know that 60 is the correct number; but one day translates to a range of 60,001 to 100,000 seconds, and few of us would know that the correct number is 86,400. The important point is that whatever your measure, you can find a game value for it.

Another nice thing about this system is that multiple actions can be combined into a single roll that still creates multiple results. For instance, a player can determine that his character is swinging across a chasm while firing a machinegun at a band of guards. He'll roll once for the entire task, then discover that the swing was successful, and one guard was hit but the others missed. By the same token, a referee can combine fire from the party of guards into a single roll, then learn that some hit and some missed. This does a lot to simplify events that involve large numbers of characters.

DRAMA DECK

In "Role-Playing Styles: Aspects of Adventure Gaming," (*Different Worlds*, Nov./Dec. 1980) Glenn F. Blascow argues that role-players can be divided more or less into four camps: power gamers, wargamers, role players, and storytellers. (Greg Costikyan's "Profiles From the Four-Fold Way," in *DW*'s Oct./Nov. 1984 issue, is based upon Blascow's 1980 article.) According to Blascow, *power gamers* are those who tend toward high level, multiclass characters with large collections of magical items and an attitude of "kill da monsters and grab da loot." *Wargamers* are those who, because of their interest in strategy above all else, expect GMs to be dispassionate arbiters between PCs and NPCs. *Role players* tend to invest such emotional energy into playing a character that PC death becomes a personal tragedy. *Storytellers* are distinguished from role players in that their characters are less the centers around which adventures revolve than they are inhabitants of a world that moves along of its own volition.

All campaigns are a mixture of the four gamer types, Blascow says, but many of the disputes that go on among gamers could be avoided if referees would state from the beginning which of the four aspects they emphasize.

Under Blascow's system, *Torg* definitely fits a mixed role player/storyteller classification, and the Drama Deck is one of the major features contributing to that fact. Cards from the Drama Deck perform many functions. During combat, the referee turns up a new card from the Drama Deck each round (10 seconds of game time) to determine who has initiative—the heroes or the villains. That card also states whether any special circumstances affect one side or the other (someone might get two actions for the round, for example) and whether any skill checks can affect the situation (allowing the PCs to *taunt* a villain into a foolish attack, for instance). Also, a line on each card affects the progress of characters trying to accomplish, during combat, such difficult tasks as disarming a bomb or climbing a cliff face.

Finally, each player holds a hand of four cards that can be used to affect the course of events, allowing second chances at skill rolls, negating an opponent's success, or the like. The result of all of this is combat that changes dramatically from round to round, adding a sense of strategy to the simple die roll system and recreating the feel of fictional battles very well.

But the Drama Deck isn't only for combat. It can be used for any sort of struggle, for haggling over the price of goods, for example. As well, certain cards allow players to introduce subplots into the overall course of an adventure, adding to the depth of the story being developed.

West End states that *Torg* can be played without the Drama Deck, but its use is highly recommended. I can only concur. Without the Drama Deck, *Torg* is still a well designed role-playing game, but with the Drama Deck, it becomes something really special.

ORGANIZATION

Torg's "Rules Book" opens with a couple of pages of introduction, then goes to a four-chapter section that tells players pretty much all they need to know about the game, much like the *Star Wars* role-playing game book does. The fourth chapter is a solitaire adventure. Next comes the "Gamemaster Section," with 13 chapters that further explain the game system and background, including the Drama Deck, combat, magic, miracles, and equipment.

The "World Book" devotes a chapter to Core Earth and to each of the invading realms, with characters, creatures, and special rules applicable to each—such as distinctive spells, cyberware and net-running rules for the Cyberpapacy realm, weird science rules for the New Nile Empire, etc. The "World Book" ends with 24 player character templates to be used much the same as those in the *Star Wars* role-playing game. (The templates lay out parameters for various character types, but players personalize their own, and the rules include directions for creating new character types from scratch.)

The last book of the three, the "Adventure Book," contains referee instructions for running sessions, using the Drama Deck, and designing new adventures. It also contains one fleshed-out adventure and the basic plots for three more. The eight center pages of this book hold a collection of tables from the rules, to be pulled out for easy reference during play.

QUIRKS

Let me take a moment to applaud West End for avoiding sexist language in the text of *Torg*. Nowadays, many game companies print a disclaimer in

their materials to the effect of "we use the generic *he* for simplicity's sake, not to exclude females." In *Torg*, West End has adopted the practice of using she in some cases, he in others. It certainly isn't the only possible solution, and it may not be your favorite solution, but it *is* a recognition that sexism in language is a problem that isn't just going to go away. Bravo, West End.

Turning to other topics, it should be mentioned to you cyberpunkers that *Torg* treats the Cyberpapacy's God-Net pretty much as just another world. A character needs a cybermodem to enter the net, but once inside, encounters and skill use follow the standard game rules. If judged as a cyberpunk role-playing game, then, *Torg* comes out lacking somewhat in detail. The same is true if it is judged as a superhero game, as there are only a few super powers mentioned in the material about the New Nile Empire. West End intends to release more detailed sourcebooks for each realm, however. It remains to be seen, then, just how fully these genres will be developed. In the meantime, the basic game rules are sufficient to get a campaign started.

Next, the healing rules struck me as a little strange in that a character's target number for recovering from wounds is equal to the character's Toughness plus a wound modifier. This means that tougher characters have to roll higher numbers to heal up, a situation that seems counterintuitive. On the other hand, the attribute used for generating the healing total is Toughness, so tougher characters have a higher base to roll from. But why not ignore the Toughness in both cases and just make a roll versus wound level? It seems the effect would be the same.

Lastly, *Torg*'s handling of religion is worth a comment or two. Quantifying faith seems a dubious thing to do, and while it has been done before—in fantasy games in particular—to do so in a modern role-playing game risks stepping on some toes. Overall, *Torg* handles the subject in good taste, giving rules for generating beneficial miracles, but not for causing evil, a laudable bias that fits with *Torg*'s casting of PCs into heroic roles. It should be mentioned, however, that *Torg* not only avoids "evil" religions, it also slights many others because of its distinctly Western mindset, as betrayed in its characterization of the mundane and physical as contaminating to the spirit, for example.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

Torg and this review will be hitting the shelves at about the same time. Unfortunately, this means the review is being written before the game has been printed, so I'm working from photocopies of the text, without the artwork. On one hand, then, I cannot comment upon the physical quality of the components or on the overall visual impression. On the other, you know that it is the content of the game—and not simply its packaging—that has impressed me.

PROBLEMS

The worst textual problems I have found so far are a few typographical errors. In general, the rules are all clear, with plenty of examples to make certain the reader understands what the rules are trying to say. With the qualification that I have yet to see the final product, I would say that this is one of the most trouble-free games I've ever seen.

SUMMATION

Torg costs $30. Assuming the components are physically up to West End's normal standards, it is worth the price.

OTHER PRODUCTS

At the time this review is being written, West End has plans to release simultaneously with *Torg* a 64-page adventure with GM screen ($10), a 128-page sourcebook of the Living Lands ($18, the first of six sourcebooks), and *Storm Knights* ($4.95), the first novel in a trilogy.

***Challenge** plans to do a follow-up review of this product once it has been released. At that time, the reviewer can comment on the visual aspects of the game, as well as other components released.*



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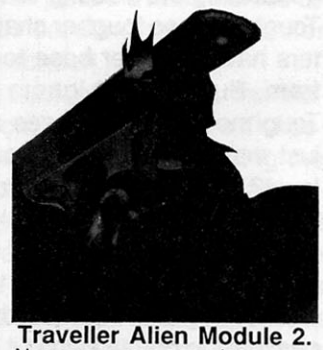
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FREE drawing!

Send us your feedback, and you will automatically be entered in our drawing for a FREE copy of **Red Empire**, the new card game of Soviet political intrigue. Build your power and purge the opposition. But watch out—if events go too far wrong, everyone loses!

Next Issue

Challenge 45 will be mailed to subscribers in July and should be on game store shelves by August. This exciting issue will include:

Twilight: 2000

You've been waiting for it—now here it is! The new **Twilight: 2000**. Loren Wiseman gives a sneak preview of the **Twilight** revision.

MegaTraveller

After rescuing a lone ship from pirate attack, the characters learn a horrible secret—but will they live to tell their story? Find out in "Snowblind."

2300 AD

The PCs are in for more than they expect when they pick up something special from the black market in "Hot Stuff," a cyberpunk scenario.

Space: 1889

Unlock the mysteries of Mercury in "The Nodding World."

And More!

Plus *Shadowrun, Star Trek, Paranoia, Renegade Legion, Aliens*, and much more. Don't miss out!

In My Opinion

Marc W. Miller

Last issue, I talked about the joys of attending game conventions. Many of you, however, already know about game cons, and some of you are even involved in running them, or refereeing role-playing events at them.

The RPGA (Role-Playing Game Association) routinely sponsors a variety of events at GenCon—for *D&D*, but also for other games, including **Traveller**, **Space: 1889**, **2300 AD**, and **Twilight: 2000**.

Since these events are kept on file at RPGA headquarters, they are available for use at other game conventions as well. RPGA members get points for participating, but the tournaments are available to any convention that wants to run them.

If you're involved in a game convention, look to the RPGA as a resource to help you get the events you want and need to make your con a success.

For more information, write to:

RPGA
PO Box 111
Lake Geneva, WI 53148



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